

University of Warwick institutional repository: <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap>

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick**

<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap/34677>

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it. Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

**SCIENCE AS PRACTICAL CRITICISM**

***AN INVESTIGATION INTO REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECTIVITY IN  
MARX'S CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY***

**BY**

**GUIDO STAROSTA**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Sociology

University of Warwick, Department of Sociology

February 2005

*‘(...) and all science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence’*

(Marx 1991: 956)

*‘The idea of one basis for life and another for science is from the very outset a lie’* (Marx 1992b: 355)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
DECLARATION	6
ABSTRACT	7
INTRODUCTION. REVOLUTIONARY THEORY IN AN ERA OF ‘POST-MODERN’ FRAGMENTATION	8
Structure of the thesis	12
CHAPTER 1. THE DIALECTIC OF ALIENATED LABOUR AND THE DETERMINATIONS OF REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECTIVITY IN THE <i>PARIS MANUSCRIPTS</i>	20
Introduction	20
Transformative method and the discovery of alienated labour	26
The historicity of the social relations of production and the determination of communism as the supersession of alienated labour	36
The determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat and the limits of the <i>Paris Manuscripts</i>	50
CHAPTER 2. THE OVERCOMING OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MATERIALIST SCIENCE	65
Introduction	65
The need to come to terms with Hegel's philosophy	67
Hegel and the 'dilemma of epistemology'	73
Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in the <i>Paris Manuscripts</i>	82



<b>CHAPTER 3. MARX ON PROUDHON: THE CRITIQUE OF DIALECTICAL <i>LOGIC</i> AND THE</b>	
<b>POLITICAL DETERMINATION OF SCIENCE AS PRACTICAL CRITICISM</b>	<b>100</b>
Introduction	100
The dialectical method as logic in Proudhon	102
Marx on Proudhon II: Dialectical knowledge and political action	119
<b>CHAPTER 4. THE COMMODITY-FORM AND THE DIALECTICAL METHOD</b>	<b>144</b>
Introduction	144
The dialectical method and the structure of Marx's exposition of the determinations of the commodity	147
<i>Inquiry and Presentation, Analysis and Synthesis: on some controversies over         the initial passages of Marx's argument in Capital</i>	147
<i>The phase of analysis</i>	155
<i>The synthetic phase</i>	161
The role and place of commodity fetishism in Marx's dialectical exposition in <i>Capital</i>	170
<i>The immediate object of exposition of the section on commodity fetishism</i>	170
<i>Free subjectivity as alienated subjectivity</i>	182
Why does method make a difference? The implications of Marx's analysis of the commodity-form for the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity	190
Further implications: on the practical nature of defetishising critique	196
<b>CHAPTER 5. CAPITAL ACCUMULATION AND CLASS STRUGGLE: ON THE FORM AND</b>	
<b>CONTENT OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN ITS ALIENATED FORM</b>	<b>202</b>
Introduction	202

Capital: the materialised social relation that takes possession of the species-powers of humanity	204
<i>Capital as the subject of the circulation process</i>	204
<i>Capital as the subject of the immediate process of production</i>	211
Valorisation of capital and class struggle	212
Some implications of Marx's exposition of the determinations of the class struggle in <i>Capital</i>	225
<i>Class struggle and the concrete subject of the movement of capitalist society</i>	225
<i>Once again, the question of the dialectical method</i>	228
<b>CHAPTER 6. REAL SUBSUMPTION AND THE GENESIS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECT</b>	<b>233</b>
Introduction	233
The production of relative surplus value: general determinations	238
Co-operation and capital's reason to be in the historical process	240
Capitalist manufacture and the material basis of the class struggle	251
Large-scale industry and workers' productive subjectivity in <i>Capital</i>	262
The <i>Grundrisse</i> and the system of machinery: in search of the missing link in the social determinations of revolutionary subjectivity	289

<b>CHAPTER 7. BY WAY OF A CONCLUSION: FURTHER EXPLORATIONS INTO THE</b>	
<b>DETERMINATIONS OF REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECTIVITY</b>	<b>310</b>
Revolutionary subjectivity as alienated subjectivity	310
Revolutionary subjectivity as productive subjectivity	316
Revolutionary subjectivity as scientific subjectivity	322
Revolutionary subjectivity as consciously self-organised subjectivity	328
Final words: Whose revolutionary action is it anyway?	332
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>337</b>

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Simon Clarke and Robert Fine for invaluable advice, intellectual inspiration and support throughout my doctoral studies. Also, I would like to thank the following people for contributing, in some way or another, to the development of this thesis: my family in Buenos Aires (and my sister Natalia in Paris!), for all their love and support; my LASA friends, for being like a second family and making life away from home easier; Daniel Chernilo, Marcus Taylor and Chris Bolsmann for being great PhD mates; my best friend Axel Kicillof from Buenos Aires, with whom I travelled many miles in this intellectual and political journey; Juan Iñigo Carrera, for helping me discover the key to the development of social science as practical criticism; and finally, all in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick (particularly Mike Neary and Annie Phizacklea), for offering a friendly and pluralist environment for the development of critical social science.

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Nara and my son Oliverio: none of this would have been possible without you.

## Declaration

Some of the materials contained in this thesis have already been published in:

Starosta, G. (2003). "Scientific Knowledge and Political Action: On the Antinomies of Lukács' Thought in *History and Class Consciousness*." Science and Society 67(1, Spring): 39-67.

Starosta, G. (2004). "Rethinking Marx's Mature Social Theory." Historical Materialism 12(3): 43-52.

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## Abstract

The key theoretical concern of this doctoral research is to trace the way in which Marx discovered and developed the determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class. In order to achieve this, a critical reading of Marx's 'early writings' from the perspective of his later works was carried out in the first part of the thesis. Specifically, the analysis attempted to find in both the insights and limitations of the former and clues towards the direction that Marx's later development would take. One of the original results of my reassessment of Marx's early work is to uncover the methodological significance of those texts for Marx's re-appropriation of Hegel's dialectical method and the consequent determination of social science as practical criticism. The second part of my investigation consists in a critical analysis of the ways in which these early insights crystallised in the writing of *Capital*. The aim of this critical reading of Marx's most important work is to provide a reconstruction which goes beyond traditional Marxist theories and their unresolved tension between the forms of objectivity and the forms of subjectivity of capitalist society. In particular, my thesis is that most readings of Marx tend to see revolutionary subjectivity as abstractly free and as the opposite of the subjectivity alienated in capital. My own investigation of Marx's critical theory aims to show that, for him, emancipatory subjectivity itself is a social form of the alienated subjectivity of the modern individual. I show that the genesis of that emancipatory subject can be found in the transformations in the materiality of social life brought about by the real subsumption of humanity to capital. Finally, the investigation attempts to thematise the intrinsic connection between these questions of subjectivity and Marx's dialectical method.



# Introduction. Revolutionary theory in an era of ‘post-modern’ fragmentation

The topic of this thesis is emancipatory subjectivity. More precisely, it is a scientific inquiry into the social determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class. Given the current state of radical intellectual labour, this may sound as an outmoded, if not directly a courageous but hopeless, subject of research. In effect, since some intellectuals proclaimed that the time had come to wish farewell to the working class (Gorz 1982), critical social theory has not ceased moving away from the notion that the working class is the social subject whose revolutionary action will put the alienation inherent in the capitalist form of social life to an end. As Iñigo Carrera graphically puts it, critical social theory moved from seeing the working class as the social subject meant to abolish the capitalist mode of production to seeing the latter as having abolished the working class itself (2003: 1).

Unfortunately, the search for answers to the question of the *social* determinations of revolutionary subjectivity in the work of contemporary Marxist scholars – where one would expect to find them - does not look very promising either. Certainly, there have been plenty of interesting developments within the Marxist tradition in recent times; in particular, among those working within a broadly-understood ‘form-analysis’ approach.<sup>1</sup> Thus since the 1980s there have been important contributions to the investigation of the determinations of the value-form (see, among others, the essays

---

<sup>1</sup> We refer to those currents that grasp Marx’s critique of political economy as a critical investigation of the historically-specific alienated forms of social mediation of capitalist society.

contained in Elson 1979b; Williams 1988; Arthur and Reuten 1998; Campbell and Reuten 2002; Bellofiore and Taylor 2004), the state-form (Holloway and Picciotto 1978; Clarke 1988; Bonefeld and Holloway 1991; Clarke 1991c; Bonefeld 1993), the legal-form (Fine 2002) and, more recently, a renewed interest in Marx's dialectical method (Moseley 1993; Moseley and Campbell 1997; Albritton and Simoulidis 2003). However, not many works have actually put the problematic of revolutionary subjectivity at the centre of the critique of political economy. We do not want to imply that scientific reflection on the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity has been *completely* absent from recent Marxist theorising (although it must be said that many of the contributions to the resurgence of value-form theory since the late 1970s and early 1980s, and certainly most of the discussions of the dialectical method, did fail to establish a firm link between revolutionary theory and the concrete political action of the working class).<sup>2</sup> But in the few cases where that question has been explicitly addressed, emancipatory subjectivity has been usually grasped, as Postone rightly notes, as *transcendentally* or *ontologically* rooted (1996: 38). This means, in a nutshell, that the ground for emancipatory subjectivity is seen as standing *outside* the alienated forms of social mediation through which the life-process of humanity asserts itself. For instance, the substance of revolutionary subjectivity is seen as residing in a generic material content – the ‘constituting power of human productive practice’ – which, in its most refined versions, constitutes the negated presupposition of capitalist forms of social mediation (cf. Bonefeld 1995). That is, the content of revolutionary subjectivity is not grasped as the ‘unity of many determinations’ but remains simple and *unmediated*, mediation pertaining at best only to *non-revolutionary* forms of

---

<sup>2</sup> As commented by Mohun (1994: 4) regarding value theory in a collection of essays from those debates.



working class subjectivity. In the same vein, the exposition of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity is not the *synthetic* result of the scientific dialectical unfolding of the movement of the social forms of capitalist society, but is represented as the product of the *analytic* reduction of those social forms to the postulated generic material content. The scientific critique of capital thereby comes down to the invocation of the powers of an unmediated human practice in the form of a (Kantian) moral imperative (as pointed out by Neary 2004).

Eventually, the logic of this approach ends up taking the conscious reflection on the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity away from *social theory* (the critique of political economy) and into the realm of *philosophy*. Thus, in his recent investigation of revolutionary subjectivity, Holloway abandoned the approach of his earlier work on the economic and political forms of capitalist social relations of production and conceptualises revolutionary theory through a blend of an Adornian philosophical critique of ‘identity’ and a Blochian philosophy of hope (Holloway 2002a). In another, widely-debated work, Hardt and Negri (2000), even if at least offering some insights into the *social* determinations of working class subjectivity (e.g. through their theory of ‘immaterial labour’), ultimately ground its revolutionary form through a recourse to a different philosophical combination: an *ontology* of the ‘productivity of desiring machines’ inspired by the post-structuralism of Deleuze-Guattari, and a Spinozian *political philosophy* of the ‘multitude’.

The key to the overcoming of the limitations of all these approaches has been correctly identified by Postone in his own recent attempt to reconstruct the Marxian critique of political economy: emancipatory subjectivity must be *socially* grounded

(1996: 38). Hence, it is a question pertaining to dialectical *social theory* – the critique of political economy - and not to philosophy. More concretely, this means grasping emancipatory subjectivity as *immanent* in the very unfolding of the reified forms of social mediation of capitalist society. Hence, Postone rightly argues, the question that critical social theory faces is to discover emancipatory consciousness as socially constituted by the alienated *historical* dynamic of capital itself (1996: 38). The problem with his approach is that in his idiosyncratic reconstruction of the Marxian critique of political economy, that historical dynamic actually *denies* the working class (*qua* working class) the determination of material bearer of revolutionary subjectivity.

This thesis takes up the challenge posed by Postone and aims at the development of a materialist inquiry into the social and historical determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. This it also does through a *critical reconstruction of the Marxian critique of political economy*. One, however, that throws an opposite result to that of Postone, namely: it shows that the outcome of the historical unfolding of the dialectic of the objectified form of social mediation turned into the very alienated subject of social life (i.e. capital) is to determine, as its own *immanent* determination, the constitution of the (self-abolishing) working class as a revolutionary subject.

A crucial element in this intellectual endeavour is the recovery of the old Marxian insight, contained in the oft-quoted passage from the Postface to the second edition of *Capital* into the intrinsic connection between the specifically dialectical form of social

science and its revolutionary content (Marx 1976a: 103).<sup>3</sup> In this sense, it could be said that this thesis represents a *methodologically-minded* reconstruction of the critique of political economy. More precisely, the thesis argues that the latter is but the scientific self-consciousness of the working-class about its own social determinations as an alienated yet revolutionary subject. Because of this determination, itself the product of its dialectical form, social science becomes determined as *practical criticism*.<sup>4</sup>

### Structure of the thesis

To develop this argument the thesis is structured into two parts. A critical reading of Marx's early writings from the perspective of his later works is carried out in the three chapters comprising the first part of the thesis. The reading attempts to find in both the insights and limitations of the young Marx clues towards the direction that his scientific development would take and which would culminate in the intellectual and political necessity of writing *Capital*. This critical engagement with Marx's early texts is not carried out through an exhaustive chronological assessment of each of those works, a task which in itself would require a whole thesis and which, moreover, would presumably reveal plenty of repetitions in terms of the scientific achievements contained in each text (e.g. the materiality of human productive subjectivity in both the *Paris Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology*). Rather, the thesis selects and

---

<sup>3</sup> A point forcefully made after Marx's death fundamentally by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1971).

<sup>4</sup> For the general methodological approach to the critique of political economy as practical criticism this thesis draws on the work of Iñigo Carrera (1992; 2003).



concentrates on three key moments in Marx's early intellectual development which, we think, manifest with greater force both the achievements and limitations of the early writings in terms of the revolution in the mode of scientific knowledge that Marx was undertaking, and that would eventually crystallise in the writing of *Capital* as the most developed form of the critique of political economy, that is, of the dialectical critique of the capital-form.

The first two chapters deal with two different aspects of the 1844 *Paris Manuscripts*. Chapter 1 firstly outlines some of the crucial breakthroughs contained in that text. In the first place, it points to this work as involving Marx's first *materialist* comprehension of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. And this meant the overcoming of the *philosophical* standpoint from which he had previously grasped the emancipatory mission of the working class. The chapter further argues that this transcendence of the philosophical representation of proletarian subjectivity actually springs from another fundamental achievement found in the *Paris Manuscripts*, namely: the discovery that the key to the comprehension of any historical movement lay in its referral to the development of the *materiality* of human *productive* individuality. On the other hand, we also argue in chapter 1 that Marx's elaboration of all these theoretical breakthroughs eventually clashed with an insurmountable barrier: the *methodological insufficiencies* underlying this first attempt at a critique of political economy. We show that Marx's reliance on a Feuerbach-inspired transformative criticism, although serving him analytically to uncover alienated labour as the hidden foundation of 'economic categories', eventually leaves him unarmed to comprehend the historical dynamic of alienated labour in the qualitative specificity of its concrete forms. He thus resorts to an *extrinsic* application of a

*general* dialectic formally borrowed from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The unfolding of the concrete social determinations of revolutionary subjectivity cannot but remain outside the reach of this early critique of political economy.

Chapter 2 gives a closer scrutiny to two fundamental claims made in the first chapter. First, that Marx's adoption of a materialist perspective was tantamount to the transcendence of philosophy. In the second place, we argue that, especially through the confrontation with Hegel's philosophy in the third manuscript, Marx starts to show self-awareness of the inadequacy of the transformative method inherited from Feuerbach as the revolutionary form of the proletarian science. Moreover, we argue that both questions are intrinsically connected. In order to do this, and unlike most commentaries, the chapter focuses not on Marx's critique of Hegel's *Phenomenology* but of his *Science of Logic*. It is argued that it is especially with the latter's critique that Marx became aware of the essential character of philosophy as alienated thought and, hence, of the need to overcome philosophy *tout court*. At the same time, the chapter advances the proposition that the very same confrontation with Hegel's *Science of Logic* was crucial for Marx's first steps in the critical appropriation of the 'rational kernel' to be found in the Hegelian dialectic, namely: the discovery of the revolutionary essence of 'the reproduction of concrete by means of thought,' -i.e. dialectical cognition - as the necessary *method* of science determined as practical criticism. Whatever the role played in the *Paris Manuscripts* through its materialist inversion as the dialectic of human labour, the self-development of Spirit through alienation and its overcoming is not where that rational kernel resides. Rather, the chapter argues, already at that early stage Marx was coming to grips with the fundamental distinction between what Hegel called the 'understanding', with its

characteristic externality between the ideal necessity of thought and the inner life of the object of scientific cognition, and what he called 'speculative thought', as the form of scientific cognition with the power to follow in thought the movement of negativity immanent in real forms. However, Marx did not uncritically appropriate that insight but turned that distinction against Hegel himself.

Some of the essential ramifications of this early recovery of the revolutionary power of the dialectical method are explored in chapter 3 mainly by means of a reconstruction of Marx's critique of Proudhon. The latter, we think, constitutes another key moment in Marx's intellectual development that condenses the theoretico-methodological breakthroughs he achieved during the 1840s. The first methodological aspect that crops up in Marx's critique of Proudhon is the critical distinction between dialectical *logic* and dialectical *method*. The former is what results when the dialectic is conceived as a general formalistic methodology to be taken ready-made from Hegel's *Science of Logic* and then applied to whatever particular content we face; in the case of Proudhon, to the 'material' questions of political economy. By contrast, the dialectical method does not consist in the application of the general necessity of logic – however 'dialectical' in form – to particular objects but simply follows in thought the *specific* necessity immanent in social forms themselves. Hence the significance of the *Poverty of Philosophy*: it contains Marx's first attempt positively to reproduce in thought the real movement of capitalist economic forms. Moreover, we try to show that this critique of Proudhon entails much more than an abstractly methodological interest; rather, the text reveals that at stake is the knowledge of the social determinations of the political action of the working class. In brief, the text makes evident the *political* nature of the dialectical



critique of political economy determined as the conscious organisation of the practical critique of the capital-form.

And yet the rudimentary and germinal state of Marx's critique of political economy at that stage rendered the scientific comprehension of the social determinations of revolutionary subjectivity at an equally underdeveloped stage. The political task that Marx faced thereby became clear to him: to put all these theoretico-methodological insights gained in the 1840s concretely into motion by giving the dialectical critique of political economy its fully developed shape. This, the first part of the thesis partially concludes, is what the writing of *Capital* was all about.

The second part of the thesis aims at substantiating this last point through a methodologically-minded critical reconstruction of Volume 1 of *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*. Chapter 4 develops a very close reading of the first chapter of *Capital* in order to show how only through a sound comprehension of the dialectical method as broadly reconstructed in the first part of the thesis can the implications of Marx's presentation of the determinations of the commodity-form be uncovered in all their plenitude. Particular attention is given to Marx's investigation of the commodity-form as entailing both the most general form of *objectivity* and *subjectivity* of the capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, the chapter also problematises the relation between the critique of these more abstract forms of alienated social life and the uncovering of the concrete determinations of emancipatory subjectivity. The argument put forward is that the former constitutes only a first step of a laborious journey involving the reproduction in thought of the further mediations underlying the latter. Only by going through that development can the critique of political economy

become determined as the self-consciousness of the social necessity of revolutionary action.

This point is reinforced in chapter 5 through a reconstruction of the precise form in which Marx introduces the class struggle in his dialectical presentation and a discussion of the implications that follow from it. In contradistinction to many contemporary readings that tend to *ontologise* the class struggle, thereby turning it into the *content* of the movement of social life in its capitalist form, the chapter argues that it is a necessary *form* in which the accumulation of capital realises its determinations. The reason for this does not lie in the methodological principles of structuralism. Rather, it is an expression of the concrete development of the historically-specific alienation inherent in the commodity-form; in the form of social capital, the materialised social relation *becomes determined as the concrete subject of the movement of modern society*. This does not imply the denial of the transformative powers of human practice personified by the workers. What this does imply is that whatever transformative powers the political action of workers might have – *both* capital-reproducing *and* capital-transcending political action – must be an immanent determination begotten by the alienated movement of capital as subject and not external to it. And in its simplest determination (i.e. as an expression of the *formal subsumption* of labour to capital), the class struggle only exists as a necessary form of capital's reproduction but not of its transcendence.

As explored in chapter 6, the socio-historical genesis of the emancipatory subject can be found in the transformations in the *materiality* of social life brought about by the *real subsumption* of humanity to capital. As Marx shows in *Capital* and the



*Grundrisse*, through the constant revolution in the material conditions of social labour, capital progressively transforms the subjectivity of the workers according to a determinate tendency: they eventually become *universal labourers*, that is, organs of a collective subject capable of consciously ruling their life-process by virtue of their capacity scientifically to organise the production process of any system of machinery and, therefore, any form of social co-operation. This mutation of their *productive subjectivity* is the necessary prelude to the constitution of the labourers as truly social individuals through their self-abolition as workers and the construction of the free association of individuals. This, we argue, is the inner material content of social life which is expressed in the form of the political revolutionary subjectivity of workers.

By way of a conclusion, chapter 7 provides a further examination of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity beyond those explicitly developed by Marx. By drawing together and elaborating on many themes only tangentially touched upon in the previous chapters, the concluding remarks of the thesis explore the further qualities of the emancipatory subject: the alienated nature of its transformative action, its inner material determination as productive subject, the specific scientific form of revolutionary consciousness (i.e. dialectics) and, finally, the necessity for its action to be consciously self-organised.

## **Part I**

**Marx's early critique of political economy: The  
discovery of the revolutionary subject and the  
development of science as practical criticism**

# Chapter 1. The dialectic of alienated labour and the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity in the *Paris Manuscripts*

## Introduction

There was a debate a while ago among scholars over the way in which Marx came to embrace the idea – explicitly appearing for the first time in the *Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* – of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject of the abolition of the capitalist mode of production. Was it through 'empirical' contact with real proletarians? Tucker states it was not, and claims that it was through the reading of socialist and communist literature of his time (Tucker 1961). Avineri, for his part, argues that it was through the critique of Hegel and his notion of a universal class (Avineri 1993: 52-64). Finally, McLellan thinks that it was through his immersion into a radical-socialist political and intellectual environment as he moved from Germany to Paris (McLellan 1973: 97).

Now, as Perkins rightly notes, what matters is not the biographical question of how Marx came to discover the proletariat but the *meaning* of that discovery (Perkins 1993: 33). In this sense, regardless of the precise form in which Marx came to discover the proletariat as a revolutionary force, the crucial point to highlight is that, until 1844, the proletariat was for Marx a *philosophical category*. More concretely, it was the mediating category through which he tried to make philosophy descend from



the heavenly realm of abstract thought to the real social life of concrete human beings (Perkins 1993).

Thus, even if attempting to transcend what he saw as the abstract character of idealist philosophy as present in both Hegel and the Young Hegelians, we think that Marx's intellectual development before the *Paris Manuscripts* was carried out within the boundaries of philosophical discourse. In particular, he was attempting to solve the whole theory-practice problematic as it appeared when seen through philosophical lenses. And this meant that, thus conceived, his endeavour was doomed to failure from its very starting point. As we shall argue in the following chapter, in the *Paris Manuscripts* Marx would come to discover that it is in the very essence of philosophy (however 'materialist' or 'dialectical' in form) to remain trapped within abstract thought and, therefore, to be indifferent to the real movement of human practice. Within the limits of philosophical thought, no real mediation is possible between theory and practice, only the appearance of it. Or, seen from another angle, within philosophy the relation between theory and practice cannot but become inverted. Instead of seeing revolutionary science ('theory') as the necessary concrete form through which the transformative action of the proletariat ('practice') is consciously organised, the latter appears as the necessary form through which the universal claims of philosophy are realised. Revolution thus becomes a logical necessity of philosophy and consists in making the world become 'philosophical' (O'Malley 1970: xxii; Marx 1992a: 257).

Very different is the perspective of the *Paris Manuscripts*. In this text Marx's starting point is no longer the universal claims of philosophy. As he states when opposing

political economy's recourse to a mythical primitive society of simple commodity producers: 'we shall start out from a *present-day* economic fact' (Marx 1992b: 323). Marx attempted to analyse this concrete economic form in its historical specificity and existing reality and, *from this point of departure*, he *then* both made sense of previous history, and discovered the hidden transitions to the supersession of modern, capitalist society. Hence, communism ceased to be a philosophical *ideal* in any meaningful sense of the word, notwithstanding the mediations with the real introduced, and became 'a *real* phase, necessary for the next period of historical development, in the emancipation and recovery of mankind' (Marx 1992b: 358). As Marx put it in an oft-quoted passage from the *German Ideology*:

Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence (Marx and Engels 1976a: 49).

The quotation cannot be clearer. Although there is a formal similarity between Marx's approach to the problem of social transformation before and after August 1844 (in terms of the finding of the future immanent in the present), there is also a subtle difference expressed in the passage from philosophy to materialist science; one,



however, which cannot be neglected if we want to grasp the innovations in Marx's thought to be found in the *Paris Manuscripts*.<sup>5</sup>

The second central aspect of the *Paris Manuscripts* is a direct result of Marx's first attempt at the critical investigation of the specific nature of modern society through the critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, i.e. through an analysis of bourgeois political forms. As Marx himself tells us in the short intellectual “autobiography” found in the *Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the main conclusion he reached was that the key to the comprehension of the specific nature of capitalist society was not to be found in the critique of the doctrine of the state, but that the critique of modern society had to start with the critique of political economy in order to, then, continue into a critique of the state (Marx 1992d: 425-6). This was the science that was able to penetrate the “internal physiology” of the modern world to be found in ‘civil society’ and, more precisely, in ‘private property’ (Teeple 1984: 201).

In light of this conclusion, in the *1844 Manuscripts* Marx turns his attention to the way in which human life is materially reproduced as the key to the understanding of society and its historical development. Hence, he placed for the first time the economic forms of society in the centre of his inquiry. As Arthur points out,

---

<sup>5</sup> On the meaning of Marx's intellectual development leading to the writing of the *Paris Manuscripts*, see Murray (1988) and Teeple (1984). The latter, in particular, raises the point of the often neglected importance in the development of Marx's ideas of his doctoral dissertation.

(...) for the first time he attributes fundamental ontological significance to *productive activity*. Through material production humanity comes to be what it is (...) material production is the '*mediation*' in which the unity of man with nature is established (Arthur 1986: 5).

The critical standpoint originally developed in the *Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* thereby acquired a more concrete meaning. In that text Marx stated that the radicality of the critique was to be measured by the extent to which it 'grasped things' as having their roots in human beings themselves (Marx 1992a: 251). In the *Paris Manuscripts* this general statement about tracing all socio-historical forms to the practical activity of individuals became more specific. The key to the comprehension of any historical movement lay in its referral to the development of human *productive* subjectivity. That is, in tracing social forms to what he discovered to be specifically human about the human being.

Certainly, simply as such this emphasis on the economic forms of society is not peculiar to Marx. As Clarke notes, this is a feature that we can find in Classical Political Economy and that it inherited from the Scottish Enlightenment (Clarke 1991a: chapter 2; 1998: 13). Yet in opposition to the ahistorical naturalism of, for instance, Adam Smith's theory of the co-evolution of modes of subsistence, class relations and forms of property, Marx's originality lay in unearthing the historical specificity of the social forms in which human productive subjectivity developed or the historicity of what he would later call the social relations of production (Clarke 1991a: 57-8). Clearly, at this stage Marx did not posit the question explicitly in these latter terms. However, as Colletti rightly points out, many of the elements constituting



the mature critique are, certainly in an underdeveloped and abstract form, in this early text (Colletti 1992: 56). When dealing with the question of the historicity of social forms, we are already entering into the discussion of another central aspect of the *Paris Manuscripts*. For here he discovered the specificity of bourgeois relations of production in *alienated labour*.

The aim of this chapter is thus critically to investigate the breakthroughs achieved by Marx in that early text from 1844. The said discovery of the historical specificity of alienated labour and, what is the flipside of this, of the economic content of the communist transformation of human life, definitely constitutes one of the fundamental scientific achievements to be found in the *Manuscripts*; one, moreover, which would lay the foundations for Marx's subsequent intellectual development. In this sense, one could argue that the *Paris Manuscripts* constitute a necessary *first* step in the production of Marx's revolution in the *mode of scientific knowledge* that the radical transformation of the world demands. On the other hand, we shall also see that the *methodological insufficiencies* of that text did not allow Marx to take that revolutionary transformation of scientific knowledge into *practical criticism* to completion. And yet, as we shall see in the course of this thesis, it was precisely the self-awareness of those limitations that gave Marx the key to the path that his scientific revolution needed to undertake.



## Transformative method and the discovery of alienated labour

The first issue that emerges when engaging with Marx's analysis of alienated labour in the *Paris Manuscripts* is the risk of becoming bogged down in what by now might seem the tedious and somewhat scholastic question of the relation between Marx's earlier works and *Capital*. This story is quite well-known. In opposition to structuralist readings of Marx, which postulate a rupture between an Hegelian-idealist young Marx and a materialist-scientific mature Marx,<sup>6</sup> 'heterodox' Marxist perspectives tend to have as their defining characteristic the view that there is continuity running through the whole of Marx's work. According to the latter, this unity within Marx's intellectual enterprise is determined by his discovery of alienation as the fundamental aspect of his critique of capitalist society. In this sense, this tradition of unorthodox Marxism stresses the importance of the Hegelian influence on Marx's thought for understanding the critical nature of his work. Hence, these authors tend to adopt as a strategy the return to both Hegel and the young Marx, in order to recover the critical force that resides in *Capital*.

Writing in the twenty first century, it is more than fair to say that this debate has been settled both from a theoretical and textual point of view (Markus 1982: 140). The existence of an inner unity underlying the different phases of Marx's intellectual project is now part of the 'ABC of Marxism'. Yet this consensus still begs two related

---

<sup>6</sup> The *locus classicus* of this position within non-Soviet Marxism is Althusser (1969). The most comprehensive critical assessment of Althusser's work can still be found in an early work by Clarke (1980).

questions. First, the precise meaning of 'alienated labour' in Marx's thought. Second, the question of the difference through which that unity of Marx's thought asserts itself (Markus 1982: 141).<sup>7</sup> The clarification of these questions is crucial for our purpose of tracing Marx's discovery of the determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. Or, to be more exact, the former task is synonymous with the latter. An abstract emphasis on the identity between 'the young Marx' and 'the mature Marx', leads to an obliteration of the differences that it is possible to find in the concrete development of Marx's work and, therefore, to an external imposition of the young Marx's analysis of alienation onto *Capital* (cf. Walton 1972; Elliot 1979). Moreover, inasmuch as those differences imply a deepening of Marx's investigations of the social determinations of alienated labour into an analysis of the particular forms that this alienation takes, of their movement - i.e. their inner connection - and of their contradictory historical development into their own annihilation, those readings risk depriving the critique of political economy of its concrete revolutionary power. The key to avoiding these shortcomings consists, as Levin (1997: 63-4) suggests, in inverting the reading strategy of most defenders of the 'continuity thesis'. That is, instead of trying to demonstrate the presence in *Capital* of the themes developed in the *Paris Manuscripts* (cf. Avineri 1993), it is necessary to assess the early texts in light of the mature form in which Marx presented those very same insights. Only in this way is it possible to grasp both the merits and the *limitations* of Marx's early critique of political economy.

---

<sup>7</sup> Clarke (1991a: 70-8) develops a useful critical assessment of the shortcomings of both orthodox and heterodox readings of Marx's analysis of alienated labour.



In this regard, we think that the very form of Marx's investigation (i.e. the method utilised in this first critical encounter with political economy) constitutes the main limitation to be found in the *Manuscripts*. Marx's critical appropriation of the critical power of the dialectical method had not fully developed at this stage and he was still under the influence of Feuerbach's transformative criticism (O'Malley 1970: xxviii-xxxii; Avineri 1993: 10).<sup>8</sup> In this work Marx attempted to do with political economy what he had previously done with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (and what Feuerbach had done with religion). That is, whereas in 1843 he applied the transformative method to the theorists of the political forms of bourgeois society, in 1844 he applied it to the scientific representations of economic forms.

Marx's transformative method involves basically four interrelated moments. First, the denunciation of the hypostasis whereby the forms of social objectivity are presented by theory as self-subsistent and actually determining the life of the human individual, who becomes determined as the predicate of those social institutions turned into the subjects of social life. Secondly, the refutation of the claims of those theories by referring all forms of autonomised social objectivity back to their origin in the practical life of the human being, that is, understanding the former as forms of

---

<sup>8</sup> Colletti (1992: 23-4), however, warns the reader of his edition of Marx's *Early Writings* that the influence of Feuerbach should not be overstated, since the theme of the inversion between subject and predicate 'is in fact one of the most profound and ancient themes in philosophical history'. Still, Colletti himself concedes that it was a contribution of Feuerbach to develop that theme in the specific context of the critique of Hegel. Moreover, what is relevant for our argument is not the intellectual lineage of the method of transformative criticism but the fact that Marx resorted to it. Another author who casts doubts over the alleged influence of Feuerbach is Teeple (1984: 47-8) But, again, he does not deny that the method of inversion of subject and predicate plays a part in Marx's critique of Hegel.

alienated objectification of specifically human attributes, capacities and relations.

Thirdly, the exposure of the contradictions that arise in theory for its naturalisation of this inversion between subject and predicate. Finally, the recognition that those theories are not simply false in the sense of offering an inaccurate characterisation of social life, but that both their conceptual inversion of subject and predicate and their internal contradictions are uncritical expressions of real inversions and contradictions existing in society.

What is important to note is that, in this approach, the motion of social forms themselves is not engaged with. Transformative criticism of capitalist society develops through the (textual) analysis of the theories of those authors who, within the limits of their bourgeois horizon, took the scientific comprehension of the former to its highest possible development. But there is no independent analysis of the movement of social forms themselves. Hence, the object under critique (capital or alienated labour) can only be grasped as an undifferentiated totality whose historical 'laws of motion' are not subject to investigation. In fact, as Markus suggests (1980: 82; 1982: 141-2), at times Marx gives the impression that the whole enterprise of offering an alternative critical presentation of the concrete forms of motion through which alienated social life develops is doomed from its very beginning. Especially in the first pages of the *Manuscripts*, the tone of his presentation seems to equate such a project with a complicit attitude towards these alienated forms of social life. Yet we cannot generalise this to the whole of the *Manuscripts*. As we will see, it is one of Marx's scientific results in this text to reach the conclusion that not only does such an alternative account not involve an uncritical stance towards capital, but it is the necessary form to discover the ways in which to transcend it. Without this mediation,



the scientific critique of capital remains too general and abstract and, hence, impotent to develop into conscious revolutionary action.

Hence the crucial importance of the question of the methodological limitations of the *Manuscripts*, which impinge on the rest of the exposition and, therefore, in Marx's analysis of the social determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. In fact, Marx's awareness of this problem acted as a trigger for the direction that his subsequent research would take: the self-clarification regarding the adequate form of critical scientific knowledge and the positive (dialectical) exposition of the determinations of the totality of capitalist social forms. Retrospectively, we can say, paraphrasing the mature Marx, that his utilisation of Feuerbachian transformative criticism enabled him 'to discover by analysis the earthly kernel of political economy' (alienated labour). However, this method proved impotent to 'develop from the actual, given relations of life the forms in which these have been apotheosized' (Marx 1976a: 494). In order to substantiate this claim, let us move to the concrete examination of Marx's discussion of the determinations of alienated labour.

As already noted, Marx does not take as his starting point the economic forms themselves, but instead engages with the *categories and (external) relations* through which political economy represents them. Thus the first part of the first manuscript is devoted to an unoriginal exposition of the theories of political economy in their own terms, showing the antinomies which arise according to the very same 'laws of movement of private property' (Markus 1980: 81). On the one hand, political economy finds in labour the 'subjective essence of private property,' which is thus turned into the principle of this specifically modern science (Marx 1992a: 341). On

the scientific critique of capital remains too general and abstract and, hence, impotent to develop into conscious revolutionary action.

Hence the crucial importance of the question of the methodological limitations of the *Manuscripts*, which impinge on the rest of the exposition and, therefore, in Marx's analysis of the social determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. In fact, Marx's awareness of this problem acted as a trigger for the direction that his subsequent research would take: the self-clarification regarding the adequate form of critical scientific knowledge and the positive (dialectical) exposition of the determinations of the totality of capitalist social forms. Retrospectively, we can say, paraphrasing the mature Marx, that his utilisation of Feuerbachian transformative criticism enabled him 'to discover by analysis the earthly kernel of political economy' (alienated labour). However, this method proved impotent to 'develop from the actual, given relations of life the forms in which these have been apotheosized' (Marx 1976a: 494). In order to substantiate this claim, let us move to the concrete examination of Marx's discussion of the determinations of alienated labour.

As already noted, Marx does not take as his starting point the economic forms themselves, but instead engages with the *categories and (external) relations* through which political economy represents them. Thus the first part of the first manuscript is devoted to an unoriginal exposition of the theories of political economy in their own terms, showing the antinomies which arise according to the very same 'laws of movement of private property' (Markus 1980: 81). On the one hand, political economy finds in labour the 'subjective essence of private property,' which is thus turned into the principle of this specifically modern science (Marx 1992a: 341). On



the other, the autonomous movement of private property it postulates results in the degradation and misery of the worker, the material bearer of that principle. Even when the wealth of society is increasing, the poverty of the worker does so too, if not in absolute, at least in relative terms. Moreover, every progress in the productivity of labour is also turned against the worker: its outcome is not the creation of disposable time for his/her spiritual development but an expansion of amount of the manual work he/she performs. The introduction of machinery, through which this increase of productivity takes place, also has the effect of deskilling the capacities of the labourer (Marx 1992a: 285-9). In brief, political economy, as 'private property become conscious for itself (...) modern industry as self', postulates at the same time the affirmation and denial of the human being (Marx 1992a: 341). As Marx himself tells us at the beginning of the section on alienated labour, it is by advancing through the concepts of political economy taken as given that he arrives at this contradiction:

We have started out from the premises of political economy. We accepted its language and its laws (...) From political economy itself, using its own words, we have shown that the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, and moreover the most wretched commodity of all; that the misery of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power and volume of his production (Marx 1992a: 322).

Since political economy 'proceeds from the fact of private property', it just unconsciously expresses this contradiction without actually 'explaining it ' (Marx 1992a: 322). Through the path consisting in the development of the concepts of political economy, Marx was able to discover the foundation of this contradiction in

the character of productive activity under the specific capitalist form, namely: in *alienated labour*. The objectivity in which the subjective powers of the worker are realised is turned into an alien power that dominates the producer himself/herself. This, says Marx, is the reason behind the autonomous movement of private property that results in the mutilation of the worker's subjectivity:

All these consequences contained in this characteristic, that the worker is related to the *product of his labour* as to an *alien* object. (...) The externalization [*Entäusserung*] of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien (Marx 1992a: 324).

Two important remarks are in order in light of the previous quote. In the first place, as Clarke remarks, it is clear that this alienation of the worker's productive powers as attributes of the product of labour does not refer either to an ideological or psychological problem of false consciousness on the part of the labourer (1991a: 75), or to his/her subjective experience of indifference towards the work he/she is doing (De Angelis 1995) -`although this is likely to be the case as a concrete manifestation of alienated labour. Nor does it refer to the fact that the labourer has to subordinate the exercise of his/her consciousness and will in the production process to the direct authority of the capitalist who, in turn, expropriates the product of the former's labour (Mandel 1971; Maguire 1972: 67). The alienation of the productive activity of the labourer refers to *a real inversion between subject and object*, where the latter



dominates the former. In order to make this point clear, it is important to note that, for Marx, this alienation also reaches the capitalist. The alienation inherent in the capitalist social form of human life involves, as we shall comment on below, the realisation of the human species-being itself – i.e. productive activity - in the form of an alien and impersonal power, the power of a thing. And this includes the non-labourer too. This is why Marx states at the end of the first manuscript that ‘everything which appears for the worker as an *activity of alienation, of estrangement*, appears for the non-worker *as a state of alienation, of estrangement*’ (Marx 1992b: 334). As much as the labourer, the capitalist actualises his/her human species-being too. However, he/she does so only in the form of the direct coercive control over the productive activity of the labourer in the alienated name of his/her capital. Therefore, his/her conscious life-activity does not participate *directly* in the *active* transformation of the objective world. Nonetheless, in this process the capitalist does not act freely. He/she only acts *as the immediate personification of the human powers incarnated as attributes of the product of labour which dominates the producer*. Hence, he/she is alienated too, but this alienation is expressed in the capitalist as a *state* instead of as an *activity*. In other words, the realisation of the activity of the labourer under the direct ‘coercion and yoke of another man’ (Marx 1992b: 331) is a concrete form of an essentially inverted mode of existence of humanity’s life-activity. In the words of Marx:

So through estranged labour man not only produces his relationship to the object and to the act of production as alien and hostile powers; he also produces the relationship in which other men stand to his production and

product, and the relationship in which he stands to these other men (Marx 1992b: 331).

And this leads to the second remark. Because now there can be no doubts that for Marx *alienated labour (understood as this real inversion between the producer and the product) is the defining characteristic of the specific form of labour under capitalist social relations of production.*<sup>9</sup> This becomes evident in the section on rent of the first manuscript, with the analysis made by Marx of feudal landed property and its necessary transition into capitalist private property. There he contrasts the command over the human productive power of the serf as a personal attribute of the feudal lord (and hence as the *direct* or *personal* political domination of the former by the latter), with the command over the human capacities of the free worker as an *impersonal, objective* attribute of the product of labour in the form of capital, which, as stated above, dominates both the producer and the non-producer:

It is inevitable that this appearance should be abolished and that landed property, which is the root of private property, should be drawn entirely into the orbit of private property and become a commodity; that the rule of the property owner should appear as the naked rule of private property, of capital, divested of all political tincture (...) Finally, it is inevitable under these conditions of competition that landed property, in the form of capital, should manifest its domination both over the working class and over the property

---

<sup>9</sup> A point that cannot be grasped if alienated labour is seen as an unmediated expression of the direct domination of the labourer by the capitalist in the process of production, as happens with the orthodox approach. On this point, see Clarke (1991a: 75).



owners themselves, inasmuch as the laws of the movement of private property are either ruining them or raising them. In this way the medieval saying *nulle terre sans seigneur* gives way to the modern saying *l'argent n'a pas de maître*, which is an expression of the complete domination of dead matter over men (Marx 1992b: 319).

So far, then, we have followed Marx's discovery of alienated labour as the concealed foundation of political economy with emphasis on the relation of the worker to the product of his/her labour as an autonomous power. However, this initial expression of alienated labour constitutes only the first of its four determinations. From this initial relation, Marx goes on to describe further developments of this alienation in the relation of the human being to his/her own productive activity (since the alien character of the product of labour cannot but be the outcome of the alien - and hence, forced - character of the productive activity itself); to his/her very species-being (since conscious productive activity is what distinguishes human life from animal life); and to other human beings (since the relation of the human individual to his/her own activity also reveals his/her relation to the activity of other human beings). In all these other forms the content of the first determination is maintained: these relations take the form of hostile potencies which dominate the human individual. Particularly remarkable is Marx's analysis of the third determination of alienated labour since through its exposition he presents for the first time the general determinations of human life from his materialist perspective, a conception which, remarkably, would remain basically unaltered throughout the rest of his works, namely: the specific

determination of the human being as a *productive* subject or of human individuality as an expression and mode of development of his/her *productive subjectivity*.<sup>10</sup>

### **The historicity of the social relations of production and the determination of communism as the supersession of alienated labour**

The importance and centrality of Marx's discovery of the specific determination of the human being in its productive subjectivity cannot be overestimated. For what is at stake in this insight *is precisely the uncovering of the material foundation from which the revolutionary powers of the proletariat must spring*. Hence, although through this discussion Marx seems to move far away from the concrete question he was trying to answer – namely, the necessary form of the revolutionary political action of the working class – he actually never lost contact with that immediate problematic. From the dialectical perspective of his mature works we can easily understand the role of these reflections. Basically, we can read Marx as engaged in the analytical moment of the dialectical research process (i.e. the movement from the concrete to the abstract, in his later terminology). In other words, he was attempting to grasp the abstract forms that were behind that immediate concrete form that triggered his whole intellectual endeavour, i.e. the will to social transformation of the proletariat. This general material content cannot by itself account for the social necessity of the proletariat's

---

<sup>10</sup> The exposition of the generic determinations of the labour process in chapter 7 of *Capital* Volume 1 (Marx 1976a: 283-90) does not involve any substantive change in comparison with the analysis of the human species-being in the *Manuscripts*. In both cases the main point is the same: it is the mediation of



revolutionary subjectivity. The relation between the latter and the former is not immediate. To put it simply, the mere fact of being the direct producers whose productive activity - the key mediator in the production of human life - is alienated does not constitute the foundation of the capacity of the workers to abolish alienated labour, that is, of their determination as a revolutionary class (in this respect, see our discussion of Arthur 1986 below). Or, better stated, we shall see that this fact constitutes the basis for the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class *only with the mediation of the material mutations in their subjectivity* as such direct producers that the historical movement of alienated labour brings about.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the crux of the matter resides precisely in the mediations that make the radical transformation of the mode of development of human productive activity take the form of the revolutionary action of the working class. Evidently, Marx would not solve this question thoroughly in the *Paris Manuscripts*. However, this text is full of interesting insights that, retrospectively, show how Marx was moving in that direction.

The reconstruction of the exposition in the *Manuscripts* reveals that what Marx offers in this text up to this stage is a description of what he discovered as the hidden foundation of the independent movement of private property, i.e. alienated labour. However, it is clear that it is not sufficient for an investigation of the real nature of capitalist society to claim that human subjectivity is realised in this alienated form and

---

individual consumption by labour or conscious productive activity that distinguishes the human form of the appropriation of nature from its animal form.

<sup>11</sup> To put it in the 'mature' terminology of *Capital*, the determination of the working class as a revolutionary subject is not an expression of the *formal* subsumption of labour to capital but of the *real* subsumption; more concretely, of the productive subjectivity of its most developed form as large-scale industry.

to describe the characteristics of this mode of existence of humanity. A real explanation must include an account of *how* and *why* labour becomes alienated. Aware of this situation, towards the end of the first manuscript Marx poses the question in the following way:

We have taken the *estrangement of labour*, its *alienation*, as a fact and we have analyzed that fact. How, we now ask, does *man* come to *alienate* his labour, to estrange it? How is this estrangement founded in the nature of human development? (Marx 1992b: 281).

It is our view that the first question leads Marx to the investigation of the specific capitalist form in which social labour is organised, i.e. the social relations of production of capitalist society. The other side of this is the discovery of the general content of the form of social relations that can overcome alienated labour. In turn, the second question leads Marx to try to find the historical reason for the existence of capitalist society (its historical mission in the genesis of communism). Obviously, the answer to these two questions must lie at the very basis of the social determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. We shall argue that, in trying to answer these two questions (especially in the case of the second one), Marx's analysis starts to become blurred. The limits of an exposition which started with the categories and laws of political economy as a given presupposition become increasingly manifest.

Regarding the first question, it is clear that it is a necessary corollary of Marx's discussion of the determinations of the human species being. For, although human productive powers are borne by each particular individual, the actualisation of these



potentialities characterising the species – that is, the realisation of the transformative powers of the human being – can only affirm itself through the organic unity of individual lives, through social life. Marx's discussion of scientific activity in the third manuscript amounts to nothing more than this (see Marx 1992b: 350). It is a clear comment on the necessary social character of individual life-activity or, seen the other way round, the necessity for the process of social metabolism to be realised through individual life-processes.

It is above all necessary to avoid once more establishing 'society' as an abstraction over against the individual. The individual *is* the *social being*. His vital expression — even when it does not appear in the direct form of a communal expression, conceived in association with other men — is therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*. Man's individual and species-life are not two *distinct things* (...) (Marx 1992b: 350).

In other words, the realisation of the human species-being (and so the development of human productive subjectivity) necessarily takes concrete form in the *social relations of production*, i.e. in the concrete historical form through which society organises the reproduction of its life. Hence, an alienated mode of existence of the human species-being can only have its foundation in the specific historical form of the social relations of production. Consequently, one would expect Marx to proceed to the exposition of the specificity of the capitalist mode of production in order to clarify the source of alienated labour. Unfortunately, this is not the path he follows. Instead, he starts to consider communism as the historical negation of capitalist society and as the supersession of alienated labour. Yet implicit in his analysis of communism lies



hidden the specific nature of capitalist relations of production as its opposite. For if Marx considers communism as the becoming fully social of the human individual, it is clear that he is contrasting this unity between the individual and the social character of human activity with their separation in bourgeois society - that is, with the private character taken by social labour. Moreover, as Clarke (1991a: 75) notes, even if this appears ambiguously in the *Paris Manuscripts*, it is discussed explicitly in the *Comments on James Mill*. In this text Marx focused on the development of the connection between alienated labour and money. In a nutshell, he dealt with money as the concrete material incarnation of the social powers of alienated labour. And although this idea appears in the *Paris Manuscripts* as well, the importance of the *Comments* is that they present in a clearer form the connection between alienated labour and the most abstract economic forms of capital: the value-form and the money-form.

Why must private property finish up in money? Because as a social animal man must finish up in *exchange* and exchange – given the premise of private property being presupposed - must finish up in *value*. For the mediating movement of man engaged in exchange is not a social, human movement, it is not a *human relationship*: it is the *abstract relationship* of private property to private property, and this *abstract* relation is the *value* which acquires a real existence as value only in the form of *money* (Marx 1992c: 261).

In turn, this investigation leads Marx to posit in a more explicit form the question of the specificity of capitalist social relations of production. Thus, he shows very clearly that the ground of alienated labour lies in the fact that the reproduction of human life

is organised through the exchange of commodities. In other words, he shows that labour becomes alienated because social labour takes the form of its opposite: private and independent labour. Obviously, this is the terminology of *Capital*. In this earlier text he still uses a somewhat philosophical language and speaks of the contradictory existence of universal – ‘the community’ – and particular – ‘the human individual’—. Thus Marx states,

The process of *exchange* both of human activities in the course of production and of *human products* is equal to the species-activity and the species-spirit, whose real, conscious and authentic existence consists in *social* activity and *social* enjoyment. Since the essence of man is the *true community* of man, men, by activating their own essence, produce, create this *human community*, the social being which is no abstract, universal power standing over against the solitary individual, but is the essence of every individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth. Therefore, this *true community* does not come into being as the product of reflection but it arises out of the *need* and *egoism* of individuals, i.e. it arises directly from their own activity (Marx 1992c: 265).

In brief, already at that time Marx discovered that the alienation of human powers as attributes of capital springs from the private form of social production or, what is the same, from the commodity-form of social relations.<sup>12</sup> However, neither in the *Manuscripts* nor in the *Comments* does Marx develop this profound insight into the

---

<sup>12</sup> Private property, the general juridical form of this alienation, is always conceived by Marx as the consequence of private (hence, alienated) labour.



direction which, on its own terms, it demanded, namely: the establishing of the connection between the private character of labour and all the different alienated economic forms which political economy represented with its categories and, more importantly, their historical movement towards their own dissolution through the revolutionary action of the proletariat. Without this link, the critique was condemned to remain too abstract and external. Nevertheless, we think that Marx himself was aware of this necessity and, one may say, took it as a sort of workplan.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, this discovery of the specificity of capitalist social relations made Marx turn his attention to the form of the social life-process that negates the alienation immanent in capitalist social forms, i.e. communism. With his discussion of communism as the 'positive supersession of private property' Marx was making an important step forward in the concretisation of the nature of the determinations of the complete human emancipation that he had previously counterposed to the merely political emancipation demanded by the Young Hegelians. In particular, in the *Manuscripts* the content of the supersession of modern society is no longer posited simply in terms of its political forms (true democracy as the abolition of the separation between state and civil society, or citizen and bourgeois) but becomes

---

<sup>13</sup> Towards the end of the first manuscript he states:

Just as we have arrived at the concept of *private property* through an *analysis* of the concept of *estranged, alienated labour*, so with the help of these two factors it is possible to evolve all economic *categories*, and in each of these categories, e.g., trade, competition, capital, money, we shall identify only a *particular* and *developed* expression of these basic constituents (Marx 1992b: 333).



essentially economic (communism or the conscious universal co-operation between the associated producers).

What is, then, according to Marx, the economic content of the communist transformation of social life? In the *Manuscripts*, Marx presents his views on the specific determinations of communist social forms after the critical account of the content of communism by previous socialist thinkers. His first statement in this regard is the following:

*Communism* is the *positive* supersession of *private property* as *human self-estrangement*, and hence the true *appropriation* of the *human* essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a *social*, i.e. human, being, a restoration which has become conscious and which takes place within the entire wealth of previous periods of development (...) it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man, the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. It is the solution to the riddle of history and it knows itself to be the solution (Marx 1992b: 348).

Briefly put, Marx is implying that the production of communism involves the supersession of alienated labour and the full realisation of the human species-being.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Passages like the one just quoted, when read out of the context of Marx's overall work, could give the impression that he sees the human essence as a generic content (an abstractly free and creative human subjectivity) that is realised in defective appearances until showing itself immediately as such under communism. The use of phrases like 'restoration of man' can certainly lead to such a reading. Marx's immediate identification of the human individual as a free being (see Marx 1992b: 328) – simply by virtue of having conscious life-activity – is also misleading (as pointedly noted by Ollman 1971: 112). But it is clear from Marx's overall argument that human productive subjectivity (i.e. the human species-being) only exists and develops (and, therefore, is produced and reproduced) *in and through* its historically-determined social forms, there being absolutely no exteriority between them. 'Really' free subjectivity is not an abstract human essence that 'returns to itself' after ridding itself of the limitations imposed by 'inhuman' social forms, but a concrete form that the *materiality* of human individuality acquires in the course of its historical process of development when becoming *fully* conscious. Indeed, under those circumstances the human individual embodies the potentiality consciously to affirm his/her historically-achieved material powers of the species in their plenitude, i.e. universally. On the other hand, it is self-evident (but a triviality) that the concrete form of freedom acquired in history by human life must be a potentiality intrinsic to its species-determination, in the same way that it is a real material potentiality of the silk-worm to become a butterfly. The recognition of this does not amount to any sort of abstract, ahistorical 'essentialism'. On the other hand, however, this does not make human freedom the content or substance striving for realisation in the course of history. The latter, essentially Hegelian, view, is precisely the approach ridiculed by Marx and Engels in their critique of the Young Hegelians in the *German Ideology* (see especially their critique of Stirner Marx and Engels 1976a: 254). And yet, as we shall see in the second part of the thesis, one could argue that it is precisely that view that, implicitly or explicitly, underlies most contemporary Marxist approaches to the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity, seen as the expression of the affirmation of an abstractly free humanity ridding itself of capitalist forms of social mediation, the opposite of its capital-determined, alienated form of existence. See Clarke (1991a: 64-6) for a critique of those approaches in relation to the *Paris Manuscripts*. In terms of readings of *Capital*, the Marxist-Humanist



This is quite a strong statement so it deserves a close scrutiny. Let us then try to disentangle the meaning of Marx's dense quotation. We have already mentioned that Marx saw the specifically human form of the natural life-process in the fact that human beings regulate their process of metabolism through consciousness. That is, they appropriate the objective powers of the environment through the organisation of the externalisation of their own objective, socially-developed forces by means of thought, thus giving their life-process the form of productive activity, of a labour-process. Through this process of appropriation of the objective world, human beings expand their own productive powers and, therefore, their capacity to regulate the metabolic 'dialogue with nature' by means of conscious activity. Hence, Marx's reference to the 'strife between existence and essence' can only mean that, before the advent of communism, the development of that human potentiality consciously and universally to act upon nature takes the concrete form of its own negation. In pre-capitalist social forms, this negation is the result of the restriction of the manifestation of human life within particularistic boundaries. Modern capitalist society develops and mobilises the universality of human powers, but only to negate their immediate manifestation as such, through their inversion as powers borne by the product of labour. As the negation of this negation, communism involves giving both 'subjective and objective nature' a 'form adequate to the *human* being' (Marx 1992b: 391). Hence a first determination of communism must be the development of productive subjectivity in a form adequate to the display of the universality of its 'mastery over

---

current associated with Dunayevskaya is particularly expressive of this in its 'materialist' appropriation of the Hegelian dialectic of freedom as the substance of human history and, hence, of revolutionary subjectivity (Dunayevskaya 1988; 1989: chapters 1 and 2). See the excellent critique of this aspect of Dunayevskaya's thought by Paul Mattick (1958).



natural forces, of his own nature as well of those of so-called "Nature" (Marx 1993: 488), i.e. as directly taking the form of the universal 'self-confirmation' of human productive powers in and through the subjectivity of each human individual.

On the other hand, we have seen that, according to Marx, the affirmation of human productive powers and, therefore, the development of productive consciousness, can only assert itself through the integration of the individual processes of metabolism into a process of social metabolism, that is, through social productive co-operation. In other words, the human being is, by its very nature, a *social* being. This means that the development of that potential universality of productive subjectivity can only take concrete form through the universality of social relations. Again, 'private property' develops this universal sociability but only in the form of estrangement, that is, as universal relations of atomisation and separation between human beings. Communism, as the determinate negation of the rule of private property, can only mean the positing of this universal sociability as a direct, conscious determination of social existence.

The fact that in the third manuscript Marx takes stock with Hegel's reduction of human (productive) subjectivity to knowing self-consciousness and, in particular, with the abstraction 'absolute knowing' as the *speculative* identity of thought and being, should not blind us to the centrality of consciousness to the social transformation which brings about the communist constitution of social life. If 'it is true that thought and being are *distinct*, but at the same time they are in unity with one other' (Marx 1992b: 351) this can only imply that the form of human subjectivity that results from the immediate positing of the human individual as a social being must

involve the complete awareness of this necessarily social character of individual life. In a passage where Marx anticipates his well-known dictum that social existence determines social consciousness, he states:

*As species-consciousness man confirms his real social life and merely repeats in thought his actual existence; conversely, species-being confirms itself in species-consciousness and exists for itself in its universality, as a thinking being (Marx 1992b: 350-1).*

It is crucial to bear in mind Marx's emphasis on the human individual's consciousness of its own social determinations as a fundamental condition for the communist form of productive association. This is the reason why Marx states that communism not only is the solution to the riddle of history but '*knows* itself to be this solution.' As a consequence of this, it is clear that the revolutionary subjectivity that produces the communist society must be the bearer of a consciousness that is fully aware of the socio-historical necessity of its action. *Revolutionary action is such for being a fully conscious action.* For the communist 'thinking consciousness',

The entire movement of history is therefore both the *actual* act of creation of communism — the birth of its empirical existence — and (...) the *comprehended* and *known* movement of its *becoming* (Marx 1992b: 348)

In brief, Marx now clearly sees that the transcendence of this inverted social existence has its content in the transformation of the economic forms of society (although this obviously involves the transformation of the whole of social life). Thus he discovers



the economic content of the proletarian revolution and, therefore, of the form of social life that supersedes capital, i.e. of communism, as the conscious, directly social productive association of individuals.

This leads us to the second question that follows from the determination of communism as the conscious realisation of the social being of the human individual. For it should be clear by now that the communist constitution of social life involves a transformation of the forms of human subjectivity and, therefore, of the forms of human consciousness. Now the question arises as to the specific character of this revolutionary consciousness that becomes aware of the social necessity of its action. Is it just an immediate consciousness which can discover the determinations of its social being through *mere* intuition or feeling? Or is it a mediated form of consciousness? And in this latter case, is it a scientific consciousness or a philosophical one? We shall give a more complete answer to this question in the course of this investigation. But from what has already been anticipated above regarding Marx's critique of philosophy as a developed expression of the alienated consciousness, it seems fair to narrow the question down to the dichotomy between seeing revolutionary consciousness as an expression of immediate intuition or as a scientifically mediated form of subjectivity. The following passage, I think, speaks quite eloquently in favour of the latter.

But natural science has intervened in and transformed human life all the more *practically* through the industry and has prepared the conditions for human emancipation, however much its immediate effect was to complete the process of dehumanization. Industry is the *real* historical relationship of nature, and



hence of natural science, to man (...) Natural science (...) has already become — though in an estranged form — the basis of actual human life. The idea of *one* basis for life and another for *science* is from the very outset a lie (Marx 1992b: 355).

As Marx states very clearly, the scientific transformation of human life already happening under the rule of 'private property' constitutes the necessary preparation of the material basis for human emancipation. It is clear then, that the consciousness that arises out of this new form of 'industry' in order to emancipate it from its alienated mode of existence, must be a scientific one, since there 'cannot be a different basis for life and science'. This is why Marx is very explicit in recognising the progressive role of private property in the historical development of human productive subjectivity. Moreover, it is on these grounds that he criticises those crude, romantic versions of communism that, in light of the inhuman consequences of the alienated form of existence of the scientific appropriation of the powers of nature, want to negate 'the entire world of culture and civilisation', and to return to 'the *unnatural* simplicity of the *poor*, unrefined man who has no needs and who has not even reached the stage of private property, let alone gone beyond it' (Marx 1992b: 346). Needless to say, this has nothing to do with a positivistic technocratic utopia, built on the basis of the existing forms of natural-scientific consciousness. Quite to the contrary, Marx is very emphatic that the emancipation of humanity does not simply involve the de-subordination of natural science to the requirements of the alienated movement of private property, but also *the transformation of the very nature of scientific consciousness itself*. This new form of science, on the basis of which the revolutionary subjectivity will be able to achieve the communist transformation of

society, Marx refers to as the 'human natural science, or the natural science of man,' or, simply, 'true human science'. In Marx's view, it will comprise the totality of what in its alienated form of existence appears as the different objects of distinct forms of science (the natural and the social), on the one hand; and as a purely theoretical activity, on the other, 'since true practice is the condition of a real and positive theory' (Marx 1992b: 364). Its basic principle, discovered in its general form by Feuerbach, consists in putting at the centre of the inquiry 'the social relation of "man to man"' (Marx 1992b: 381). Yet, as we shall see, this basic principle as such would prove insufficient to give the revolutionary science its adequate form.<sup>15</sup>

### **The determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat and the limits of the *Paris Manuscripts***

In the previous section we left a question unanswered, namely, Marx's explanation of the necessity of alienation in human historical development. In other words, the issue at stake is the grounding of capital's historical *raison d'être* and, therefore, of its overcoming. Having shown how for Marx the realisation of the human species-being can only be the product of historical development, it is clear that he is not suggesting that it is a contingent and extrinsic tragedy imposed onto an otherwise eternally free human essence and that it is a matter of recovering a pure subjectivity oppressed by private property. The alienated existence of human subjectivity must play a

---

<sup>15</sup> More concretely, we shall argue that the transformation at stake of the nature of science concerns its very form, i.e. its method. A 'true human science' can develop such a revolutionary content only by virtue of its *dialectical* form.



determinate role in its development. Moreover, it is precisely the fulfilment of this role that has to constitute the necessary condition for its historical supersession. This is what links the future and the present so that the former is not just a utopian project but finds the conditions for its emergence immanent in the historical movement of bourgeois society. In this sense, for Marx freedom can only be the result of a 'self-superseding movement', which 'will in reality undergo a very difficult and protracted process' of social transformation (Marx 1992b: 365). In turn, this theme is immediately linked with the question of the determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. For if the working class is the historical subject whose revolutionary action is to achieve the abolition of alienated labour, this can only mean that those conditions which private property engenders in the course of its development, and which generate the necessity of its own dissolution as a form of existence of human subjectivity, are necessarily activated through the political action of the former.

We would like to argue that it is especially in this aspect of Marx's early critique that its abstract character is most strongly felt and the course of his exposition becomes increasingly blurred. As we shall see, in the *Manuscripts* Marx was unable to develop the mediations that connect the revolutionary transformation of the forms of social life required by the further development of the materiality of the human species-being with the political action of the workers.

Yet this does not mean that no evolution obtains with respect to Marx's previous formulation, which posed the question in terms of the realisation of philosophy. An



expression of the novel insights developed can be read in Marx's critique of other socialist thinkers:

But the antithesis between *propertylessness* and *property* is still an indifferent antithesis, not grasped in its *active connection*, its *inner* relation, not yet grasped as a *contradiction*, as long as it is not understood as the antithesis between *labour* and *capital* (Marx 1992b: 345).

This passage can be taken as a kind of self-criticism of his previous views on social transformation. For the antithesis between lack of property and property is what he posited in the *Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* as the ground for the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. Since he showed that private property is only the juridical expression of alienated labour, it is clear that the overcoming of alienation can only spring from the abolition of the latter. Without the annihilation of the alienated character of productive activity, the juridical elimination of private property can only lead to another form of the reproduction of alienated labour, one in which the 'community is simply a community of *labour* and equality of *wages*, which are paid out by the communal capital, the *community* as the universal capitalist. Both sides of the relation are raised to an *imaginary* universality — *labour* as the category in which everyone is placed, and *capital* as the acknowledged universality and power of the community' (Marx 1992b: 346-7).

On the other hand, by posing the question in terms of alienated labour, he eliminates the externality between the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat and capitalist social forms that characterised his previous formulation. That is, from an abstract

negation of capital, revolution becomes its determinate negation. Whereas before he conceived of the proletariat as being excluded from the general social relation of modern society (private property) and founded his revolutionary role precisely in this social existence alienated from society (propertylessness), he now sees the worker as *within* the general social relation of bourgeois society (alienated labour or capital). So much so, that in the second manuscript Marx shows that the inversion between subject and object is so real to the point of directly turning the conscious existence of the worker into a mode of existence of capital.

The worker is the subjective manifestation of the fact that capital is man completely lost to himself, just as capital is the objective manifestation of the fact that labour is man lost to himself. But the *worker* has the misfortune to be a *living* capital (...) (Marx 1992b: 335).

Instead of deriving the proletariat's revolutionary being from the universal exclusion from the specific, alienated social relations governing modern society (and therefore, from some sort of pure subjectivity uninfected by private property), he came to derive it from the proletariat being the concentrated, active incarnation of the former. Hence, the externality between labour and capital is eliminated and they are now seen in their necessary, albeit contradictory, unity. It is this contradictory character, deriving from the fact that human productive subjectivity develops its powers as an attribute of its product that gives alienated labour its dynamic, self-moving character that drives it into its own dissolution. And Marx makes explicitly clear that the revolutionary movement can only derive its transformative powers from the historical movement of this alienated social existence. This is why he argues that 'it is easy to see how



necessary it is for the whole revolutionary movement to find both its empirical and its theoretical basis in the movement of *private property* or, to be more exact, of the economy' (Marx 1992b: 348). Simply put, what this means is that the consciousness of the workers is a concrete form of the alienated consciousness. And this holds for both the forms of working class subjectivity that reproduce the movement of alienation and that which develops the historical powers necessary to abolish it, that is, *revolutionary consciousness*.

This crucial point is correctly highlighted by Mészáros's detailed study on the *Paris Manuscripts* when he states that the revolutionary consciousness is not a free, non-alienated consciousness but a 'consciousness of being alienated' (Mészáros 1970: 181). However, this insight is not argued on the grounds of the development of the concrete determinations of the alienated consciousness that make it become conscious of its own alienation. The reason he gives is purely formal and comes down to the fact that if the movement of the alienated consciousness did not produce the awareness of its own social existence, the conscious transformative action aiming at its transcendence would be impossible. Thus he states,

Were society an 'inert totality of alienation', nothing could possibly be done about it. Nor could there be any problem of alienation, or awareness of it, for if consciousness were the consciousness of this 'inert totality' it would be one with alienation... not a consciousness that reveals and opposes - in however abstract a form - the alienated nature of this inert totality. Alienation is an inherently dynamic concept: a concept that necessarily implies change. Alienated activity not only produces 'alienated consciousness', but also the



‘consciousness of being alienated’. This consciousness of alienation, in however form it might appear...not only contradicts the idea of an alienated inert totality, but also indicates the appearance of a *need* for the supersession of alienation (Mészáros 1970: 181).

This is certainly true but close to a truism. That is, once we correctly highlight that there is no 'outside' from which to dissolve this alienated social existence, and that this is a transitory, historical phenomenon that is bound to disappear, it is evident that it must be the movement of alienated activity itself that produces the antagonistic form of alienated consciousness capable of putting alienation to an end. The question is about the concrete forms in which this negation of the negation asserts itself. Thus stated, Mészáros's argument simply involves a purely logical necessity. Moreover, what interests us here is the *concrete*, fully developed revolutionary consciousness of this alienated social existence and not one that opposes it in 'however abstract a form' (Mészáros 1970: 181). This is not for any scholastic reasons but because we are searching for the determinations of the transformative action of the proletariat embodying the social powers that enable it to abolish alienated labour. Hence, we do not find satisfactory the only reference to the materiality of social life that this author puts forward in simply arguing that 'needs produce powers just as much as powers produce needs' (Mészáros 1970: 181). For the central question remains unanswered: what are the concrete social determinations of the *materiality of the productive subjectivity of the labourers* that give those very same 'powers and needs' a conscious revolutionary form? No response to this crucial question can be found in Mészáros's reading. No wonder, then, that he ends up offering a *moral* basis for the necessity of transcending the alienated forms of bourgeois society. More incredibly, he even states

that after the abolition of alienation not only morality persists but the legal-form as well (Mészáros 1970: 186-9)!

Without entering into a detailed discussion of the merits and limitations of Mészáros's own account, let us just point out that, at least from the exegetic point of view, this grounding of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat on a moral necessity is completely misguided. As matter of fact, Marx makes the explicit critique of moral consciousness as an uncritical form of the alienated consciousness. Thus he states:

It is inherent in the very nature of estrangement that each sphere imposes on me a different and contrary standard: one standard for morality, one for political economy, and so on. This is because each of them is a particular estrangement of man and each is centred upon one particular area of estranged essential activity; each is related in an estranged way to the other ... (Marx 1992b: 362).

Mészáros is aware of this Marxian critique of morality as an uncritical expression of alienation (Mészáros 1970: 187).<sup>16</sup> But he reads Marx as implying that what is wrong is not morality *per se* but the abstract, transcendental form of the moral argument. One, precisely, that abstracts from the material questions with which political economy deals. For him, the unalienated moral consciousness is that which, while still

---

<sup>16</sup> To be more exact, moral consciousness is the alienated consciousness of the commodity-producer who, unaware of the social determinations of his/her life-activity, sees his/her social being as an external force standing over and against his apparently independent individuality in the form of an 'ought to be'.



arguing in terms of moral evaluation, critically reflects upon those material questions of the concrete life-activity of human beings, e.g. the nature of productive activity. Yet we think that the quotation is quite revealing as a critique of moral standards altogether as the basis for any action aiming to revolutionise the alienated conditions of social life.

Although Meszaros's recourse to a moral necessity as the ground for the revolutionary subjectivity of proletariat is unacceptable, his inability to find a consistent account of its determinations in the *Manuscripts* is, to some extent, understandable. For one of the problems of this early text is precisely the lack of a rigorous exposition of those social determinations and their historical genesis through the unfolding of the contradictions of alienated social life. This does not imply that no reference to this problematic can be found. Certainly, as we commented above, Marx was well aware of the necessity to address this question. But the problem resides in the unsatisfactory character of his attempt at an explanation, derived, in turn, from the limitations of Marx's own comprehension of the 'laws of motion' of alienated labour at that time.

What is, then, Marx's account of the necessity of alienated labour and its transcendence in the *Paris Manuscripts*? It is difficult to find a straightforward answer to this question since Marx's own discussion is unclear and hesitant. Thus he seems to oscillate between different grounds for the workers' revolutionary subjectivity. Now, we would like to argue that behind this insufficiency of Marx's exposition we can find the methodological limitations of this early text. For a satisfactory account of this problematic would have required the deployment of the critical power of the dialectical method understood as the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of



thought'. This is the method that Hegel discovered but mystified in his *Science of Logic*. The critical appropriation of Hegel's discovery fully crystallised only some years later in Marx's life through the development of his 'mature' critique of political economy. Regarding the question of the abolition of alienated labour, Marx's appropriation of the insights developed by Hegel related more to the 'materialist inversion' of Hegel's account of the historicity of the forms of human subjectivity and their historical development through the process of self-alienation and its transcendence:<sup>17</sup> hence Marx's account of the reason to be of private property. In a quite Hegelian fashion, he grounds the necessity of alienation in a very abstract and general dialectic, as a kind of movement of engendering a determinate negation through the previous development of its opposite into extreme maturity. What Hegel essentially sees in terms of an abstract mental labour, that is, as a movement of consciousness, Marx grasps in its reality as the historical movement of real, sensuous productive activity of human beings.<sup>18</sup> Yet he takes from Hegel's account the validity of the general form of the historical movement in the 'dialectic of negativity as the producing principle' (Marx 1992b: 385-6). Although in the *Phenomenology* 'the various forms of estrangement which occur are therefore merely different forms of consciousness and self-consciousness' (Marx 1992b: 385), Hegel has the merit of conceiving

---

<sup>17</sup> And yet, we shall argue in the next chapter that, already in the *Paris Manuscripts* – more precisely, in the section discussing Hegel's *Logic* – Marx initiated the critical appropriation of the rational kernel of the dialectical method as developed by Hegel.

<sup>18</sup> For a good discussion of this aspect of the young Marx's critique of Hegel which avoids the misreading of existential and phenomenological Marxism, see the already-cited work by Arthur (Arthur 1986).

the self-creation of man as a process, objectification as loss of object [*Entgegenständlichung*], as alienation and as supersession of this alienation; that he therefore grasps the nature of *labour* and conceives objective man — true, because real man — as the result of his own labour (Marx 1992b: 386).

It is this form of the Hegelian 'dialectic of negativity' that Marx uses to account for the necessity of the historical dynamic of alienation and its supersession. For he seems to suggest that private property is necessary insofar as the human species-being, in order to develop the plenitude of its powers to objectify itself, must first negate itself as a fully conscious social productive activity, thus affirming itself as alienated, unconsciously social activity. In turn, only after the expansion and generalisation of private labour - hence, of private property - and the consequent plenitude of alienation, can the moment of negation of the negation emerge.

The *real, active* relation of man to himself as a species-being, or the realization of himself as a real species-being, i.e. as a human being, is only possible if he really employs all his *species-powers* — which again is only possible through the cooperation of mankind and as a result of history — and treats them as objects, which is at first only possible in the form of estrangement (Marx 1992b: 386).

We can see that the movement appears presented as following an abstract and generic 'dialectical' necessity. This is not necessarily wrong as a formal description of the movement of self-production of humanity, but it is precisely its generality that makes it insufficient to account for the concrete determinations that we are searching for. In



other words, this general dialectic lacks any concrete specificity regarding the form of motion of the annihilation of capital through the revolutionary action of the working class.<sup>19</sup> This led Marx to offer several grounds for the proletariat's revolutionary subjectivity. The reason for this is that every extreme manifestation of the alienated social existence (whether progressive or not) can be seen as a symptom of that state of plenitude and could therefore fit into that general scheme as the condition for the emergence of the revolutionary powers of the workers. One instance of this we can find in the passages we have already referred to regarding Marx's views on a 'truly human science.' There he argues that since the universal alienation in the object leads to the development of 'industry' and the consequent coming into being of the complete humanisation of nature, it must engender the scientific consciousness which eventually frees itself from all traces of its alienated existence through the practical abolition of private property (Marx 1992b: 355). That is, it is the generalisation and complete intensification of inhumanity that produces the constitution of real humanity. As he states some pages later in the section called *Money*:

Only through developed industry, i.e. through the mediation of private property, does the ontological essence of human passion come into being, both in its totality and in its humanity; the science of man is therefore itself a product of the self-formation of man through practical activity (Marx 1992b: 375).

---

<sup>19</sup> One can say that in the *Manuscripts* Marx is guilty of the charges made by Düring of externally imposing the negation of the negation on history. Engels correctly points out why this is not the case of *Capital* (Engels 1975: 107-12).



On another instance he poses this movement as pertaining to the development of the totality of the physical and intellectual senses of the human being (Marx 1992b: 351-354). These can develop in a truly human form only after acquiring an alienated mode of existence whose synthetic expression is their one-sided subordination to the sense of having. Again we see the general dialectic at work:

Therefore *all* the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple estrangement of *all* the senses – the sense of *having*. So that it might give birth to its inner wealth, human nature had to be reduced to this absolute poverty (Marx 1992b: 352).

Marx, somehow idealistically, also fits the 'self-development of communist consciousness' into this general scheme. In his critical account of the different forms of communist consciousness, he states that 'the supersession [*Aufhebung*] of self-estrangement follows the same course as self-estrangement' (Marx 1992b: 345). He seems to be arguing that, in order to develop itself, truly communist consciousness must first negate itself as the real determinate negation of private property by taking some undeveloped form. In the form of 'crude communism,' the political programme put forward would not lead to the abolition of private property, but to its generalisation (Marx 1992b: 346). This 'first positive abolition of private property' is partially negated by those forms of communistic consciousness that, although clear about the necessity to abolish private property (instead of equalising its distribution) as the form of superseding human self-estrangement, are 'still held captive and contaminated by private property' (Marx 1992b: 347-8). Finally, communist 'thinking consciousness' develops the plenitude of its critical powers completely to abolish

alienated labour. In this form, it no longer represents the abstract negation of private property, but its determinate negation and therefore, its truly positive supersession (Marx 1992b: 348).

Marx thus alternates between different foundations for the social necessity of abolishing alienated labour without offering a solid ground for this process of social transformation. Moreover, there is no account of the different stages through which alienated social development must pass before attaining its communistic form, or of the role of the political action of the workers - the class struggle - in that contradictory process. Marx just states the necessity of the starting point and the finishing line. But he does not demonstrate the genesis of either of them. What is worse, there is no real mediation between that material ground for the abolition of private property and the subjectivity of the labourers. The need for such mediation is correctly identified by Arthur:

(...) there are two levels of necessity for the overthrow of private property: (a) abstractly, there is the need to restore man to himself subsequent to the supersession of the system of estrangement; (b) concretely, there is the process whereby capital in its own development leaves the proletariat with no other option than to take the struggle against alienation to its conclusion through identifying the problem as capital, itself the product, expression and mediation of alienated labour (Arthur 1986: 40)

The key, as far as the revolutionary subjectivity is concerned, is, precisely, the mediation between these two points. In the *Manuscripts*, the only connection in this



regard is that condition (a) refers to the development of productive subjectivity and, regarding point (b), that the proletarians are the class of direct producers. Thus the emancipatory mission of the proletariat is derived from their being the active incarnation of the estranged relation to productive activity which lies at the basis of all forms of alienated social existence due to the 'ontological centrality' of labour in the constitution of social being.

It further follows from the relation of estranged labour to private property that the emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the *political* form of the *emancipation of the workers*. This is not because it is only a question of their emancipation, but because in their emancipation is contained universal human emancipation. The reason for this universality is that the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are nothing but modifications and consequences of this relation (Marx 1992b: 333).

Arthur is right in pointing out that we should not read Marx as implying that the identification of the proletariat as the 'class of the future' is based on its universal suffering, as a 'matter of a sympathetic identification with their problems' (Arthur 1986: 145). However, we disagree with this commentator's view that Marx's grounding of the revolutionary nature of the proletariat in its 'strategic position in the economic order' where productive activity is the 'key social mediator', suffices as an analysis of the social determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity. This analysis must include the positive exposition about the forms of capital's development that produce in the workers not only the will to social transformation but also the material



powers to achieve it. And it is this latter investigation that is missing in the *Manuscripts*. What is more, the materiality of the conditions generating Arthur's 'abstract necessity (a)' seems to stand in blatant contradiction to the barbaric materiality of the life conditions of the workers that Marx described to be the result of the movement of private property. Hence, it is not clear how that 'abstract level of necessity for the overthrow of private property' can be activated concretely in the subjectivity of the workers. In other words, how to reconcile that revolutionary scientific consciousness that discovers the necessity to abolish capital with the brutalised state to which the workers are condemned by the division of labour of manufacture? How to turn the degradation of the physical and intellectual senses of the workers into that fully developed human sensuousness that Marx claimed to be a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of communism? As Markus points out, 'there seems to be no imaginable practico-political strategy, able to bridge this gap and to render the initial contact between theory and practice, between the actual situation of the revolutionary subjects and the radical content of the theory possible' (Markus 1980: 84). No wonder, then, that in attempting to offer this mediation, Marx only deploys again that generic dialectic of generation through extreme negation of the previous stage. Without a detailed positive account of the laws of motion of alienated labour and the determinations of the political action of the workers as personifications of the former, no significant guide to action can be drawn from the revolutionary theory. Or, better stated, from a too general and undifferentiated account of the nature and movement of capitalist society, only a general and abstract political programme can be advanced: abolish alienated labour! The scientific critique of capital was bound to remain external and thus impotent fully to unite with practice.

## Chapter 2. The overcoming of philosophy and the development of a materialist science

### Introduction

In the first chapter we have traced Marx's initial discovery of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject. Our partial conclusion was that the *Paris Manuscripts* represented an enormous breakthrough in Marx's intellectual development. More concretely, we attempted to show that it is in that text that we can find Marx's first attempt at a materialistic point of view about the determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class. However, we also argued that that first step did not solve all the questions that it had set itself to answer. Rather, this early text can be seen as laying down the foundations for the future research that he would undertake throughout the rest of his life. We may see the *Paris Manuscripts* as both asking the correct questions and giving the *general* direction to be followed in order to find the social determinations of the revolutionary political action of the proletariat. That approach, we argued, consisted in focusing on the development of the materiality of human productive subjectivity in its historically-specific forms as the basis for any investigation about the transformative powers of human action. However, we also showed that beyond a certain point, Marx's exposition became impotent further to advance his discoveries. In brief, we tried critically to engage with this 'early Marx' in order to highlight both the insights and limitations to be found at that stage of his



development of the critique of political economy in the light of its developed form in *Capital*.

Regarding the merits of the *Paris Manuscripts*, we pointed out that one of the crucial steps forward made which, besides, marked a difference in relation to his previous writings, was the definitive abandonment of the standpoint of philosophy. In other words, we claimed that Marx's adoption of a materialist perspective was tantamount to the transcendence of philosophy. On the other side, we argued that most limitations of Marx's early critique could be explained by the inadequacy of the transformative method inherited from Feuerbach as the revolutionary form of the proletarian science.

In the previous chapter these two rather strong claims were just tangentially touched upon. It is a first aim of this chapter to give those assertions a closer scrutiny. We shall see that, in fact, both aspects are interrelated. This because, although Marx's positive development throughout the whole of the *Paris Manuscripts* already moves beyond the philosophical discourse, it is not until the third Manuscript that he feels the need explicitly to address the question of the status of philosophical thinking. Initially, Marx develops this investigation through the critique of the Hegelian dialectic from a still Feuerbachian methodological perspective. However, in the very course of his discussion he becomes aware of both the limitations of Feuerbach's materialist 'science of man' and the critical power which, once purged from its idealist inversions, could be found in the dialectic. As we shall see, from this moment onwards Marx scientific enterprise consisted in further developing this insight up to the point of giving the critique of political economy a fully developed dialectical form.



## The need to come to terms with Hegel's philosophy

As Arthur suggests, Marx's turn to the critique of the Hegelian dialectic in the *Paris Manuscripts* seems to be quite abrupt. In effect, up to that point Marx had been developing his first critical confrontation with political economy along Feuerbachian methodological lines (Arthur 1986: 45). More concretely, a look at the original order in which Marx developed his argument (different from the one in which it was published), shows that this sudden turn occurs in the context of the discussion of the historical movement leading to the supersession of alienated labour in communism. It is at that point that he veers radically, leaving momentarily behind the critique of economic categories, in order to develop 'by way of explanation and justification...some considerations in regard to the Hegelian dialectic generally and especially its exposition in the *Phänomenologie* and *Logik* and also, lastly, the relation (to it) of the modern critical movement' (Marx 1992b: 379).

How are we to understand this abrupt change in Marx's object of criticism? In his detailed commentary on the *Paris Manuscripts*, Arthur gives a plausible explanation for this. According to him, in discussing the process of the genesis of man as man (the historical realisation of the human species being), Marx became aware of the formal similarity between that movement and the one Hegel attributes to the absolute spirit in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Arthur 1986: 46). Both involve a process of immediate unity between subject and object, a stage of opposition or radical difference and a recomposition of that unity but now as a mediated unity, in which both the subject and the object appear as the former's own product. In other words, in both cases we are facing a process of historical self-production. The difference between them lies in

their views on which the subject is: absolute spirit for Hegel and the human being as a natural productive being for Marx.

Whilst we do not want to deny the exegetical accuracy of this line of argument, we think that it is not the most fruitful way of approaching the question. First, this materialist appropriation of Hegel's historical dialectic, although important for Marx's discovery of communism as the immanent result of the historical development of human productive subjectivity in its alienated capitalist form, eventually proved impotent to ground the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class. As we have already mentioned, that abstract dialectic could only account for the general form of movement of the development of human productive subjectivity up to the negation of its alienated form, but could not explain the concrete forms through which it unfolds in the course of history. In other words, that abstract dialectic did not say anything about the specific 'laws of motion' presiding over the movement of modern society. And neither did it explain the concrete historical genesis of the capitalist mode of production and, therefore, its concrete role in the 'natural history' of human productive subjectivity. In fact, we shall see that as Marx advanced in the scientific cognition of the concrete determinations of the movement of capital (and therefore, of the concrete determinations of the development of the conscious revolutionary action of the proletariat), he progressively dropped the recourse to that general dialectic as the ground for the abolition of capital. Hence, whatever the role it played in 1844, that 'materialist inversion' of the formal movement of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, played no significant part in Marx's subsequent intellectual development.



In the second place, although in the *Paris Manuscripts* Marx clearly started his critique of Hegel with a critique of the latter's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he also engaged with Hegel's *Science of Logic*. And it is especially with the latter's critique that Marx became aware of the essential character of philosophy as alienated thought. By converting logic into ontology, Hegel actually took philosophy to its necessary extreme, thereby exposing the idealist inversion inherent in all forms of philosophical thought. While other philosophers dogmatically and extrinsically imposed a logical necessity upon the movement of real concrete forms, according to Marx Hegel went further and self-consciously took the movement of logical forms as engendering the content and movement of the real itself. In an absolutely inverted form, Hegel thus claimed to have eliminated the exteriority between the form and content of scientific knowledge, between method and object of cognition.

As we shall try to show, this confrontation with Hegel's *Science of Logic* was crucial for Marx's discovery of the revolutionary essence of 'the reproduction of concrete by means of thought,' - i.e. dialectical cognition - as the necessary method of science determined as practical criticism. A one-sided emphasis on Marx's materialist inversion of the form of motion of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* overlooks this crucial step in Marx's advance in the production of the critique of political economy as the scientific revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat.

Hence, to the implicit reason behind Marx's engagement with Hegel's thought mentioned by Arthur, we think it necessary to add the explicit one put forward by Marx himself in the opening passages of that section. There he states:



Modern German criticism was so pre-occupied with the old world, and so entangled during the course of its development with its subject-matter, that it had a completely uncritical attitude to the method of criticism, and was completely unaware of the seemingly formal but in fact essential question of how we now stand in relation to the Hegelian dialectic. The lack of awareness about the relation of modern criticism to Hegelian philosophy in general and to the dialectic in particular has been so pronounced that critics like Strauss and Bruno Bauer are still, at least implicitly, imprisoned within Hegelian logic, the first completely so and the second in his *Synoptiker* (where, in opposition to Strauss, he substitutes the "self-consciousness" of abstract man for the substance of abstract nature) and even in his *Das entdeckte Christentum* (Marx 1992b: 379-80)

According to this passage, what moved Marx to a critical engagement with Hegel's philosophy is the fact that the critical form of consciousness prevailing in Germany at that time, far from going beyond the Hegelian mystification of the dialectic, was actually reproducing it 'word by word' (Marx 1992b: 380). The motivation, then, was not abstractly theoretical but political through and through. In this sense, it is important to remember the domination by the Young Hegelians of the radical circles in Germany (Shortall 1994: 12-15). In particular, what Marx is reproaching 'modern German criticism' for is the fact that, by 'becoming imprisoned within Hegelian logic,' their critique of modern society remains inevitably *philosophical*, that is, impotent to develop into a *practical* criticism involving the radical transformation of the existing state of affairs. Instead of leading to the practical abolition of the contradictions of modern society, 'absolute Criticism' ends up trapped 'into the *single* dogmatic

antithesis of its own cleverness and the stupidity of the world', which stubbornly remains indifferent to the 'absolute truths' discovered by the former (Marx 1992b: 381).

But why is philosophical critique necessarily incapable of achieving a practical transformation of the world? Is that not a specific problem of Hegel's *idealist* philosophy, which can be overcome by replacing it with a *materialist* one? As stated above, Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy actually involved the critique of philosophy as such: this because, as we shall see, Hegel is considered by Marx to be the one who pushed philosophy to its limits, unconsciously laying bare its essential nature as 'nothing else but religion brought into thought and developed in thought, and that it is equally to be condemned as another form and mode of existence of the estrangement of man's nature' (Marx 1992b: 381). Therefore, a truly critical appropriation of Hegel's thought could only mean for Marx the transcendence of the philosophical standpoint *tout court*. For how can a mode of existence of the alienated consciousness intrinsically bound to uncritically express human alienation, be the basis for its supersession? The 'establishment of *true materialism* and of *real science*' (Marx 1992b: 381) initiated by Feuerbach and which Marx attempted to bring to completion, was incompatible with the starting point of philosophical reflection. A real science, Marx learnt from Feuerbach, can only have as its point of departure 'the social relationship of 'man to man' (Marx 1992b: 381). In fact, it was Feuerbach who had accomplished the development of a true materialist philosophy. Through the inversion of Hegel's dialectic, he showed that a true philosophy should take nature not as a mediating stage in the self-development of the Idea, but must have the former as



both starting point and endpoint of its theoretical reflection. As Schmidt (Schmidt 1971: 24) points out:

For Feuerbach, Hegel's philosophy is philosophy from the standpoint of the philosopher, while he is a philosopher from the standpoint of non-philosophy. Instead of beginning with philosophy in order to end with philosophy, he wanted to begin with non-philosophy in order to return through philosophy to non-philosophy...The new philosophy no longer claimed any special position as against the other sciences but had its presupposition, like them, in nature.

Yet even if developed from the standpoint of 'non-philosophy', Feuerbach remained a philosopher. Although he did not see his own philosophy as bearing any privilege over the rest of the sciences, he still saw his intellectual endeavour as a philosophical reflection. In other words, he offered a general - in his case naturalist - *interpretation of the world* (a 'world-view') that was meant to provide an external 'philosophical' foundation for the objectivity of human subjectivity. And from that philosophic standpoint which ultimately still 'regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude,' it was impossible for him to see the materiality of human thought as the form in which 'sensuous human activity, practice' is organised (Marx 1976e: 3).<sup>20</sup> This, we think, is the only meaningful way in which to understand the so-called 'unity of theory and practice.'

---

<sup>20</sup> For good analyses of the similarities and differences between Marx and Feuerbach see Colletti (1973: 222-228; 1992: 51-6), Schmidt (1971: 24-33) and, especially, Arthur (Arthur 1986: 114-25).

In brief, Feuerbach cleared the terrain for the necessary step forward in the development of a materialist standpoint. However, it was only Marx who took up this challenge and discovered that the completion of the materialist inversion of Hegel required more than the 'naturalisation' of philosophy. It involved the discovery that the starting point for any true materialist science was not just the 'social relation of man to man' in the abstract, but grasped in its essential determination as historically-determined conscious productive practice. It was in the very nature of philosophy to be incapable of grasping this elementary determination of human subjectivity. The development of a materialist science, as the comprehension - and hence conscious organisation - of human practice, entailed the overcoming of philosophy.

### **Hegel and the 'dilemma of epistemology'**

The central question of modern philosophy is, to put it simply, an epistemological one, in the sense of being an enquiry into the conditions for the genesis and attainment of true scientific knowledge. As Gunn puts it, modern philosophy is essentially a 'metatheory', a 'second-order discourse' aiming at evaluating and validating the categories employed by scientific theory, conceived as 'first-order discourse' (Gunn 1989: 89). More concretely, philosophy is meant to offer, in the manner of an external arbiter, the criteria on which to attribute 'objective validity' to the representations produced by scientific theory. This means, therefore, that the objectivity of scientific knowledge is considered to be grounded in the generic *subjectivity* of an abstractly rational thinking being (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 221). The difficulties of epistemology arise because of its attempt to provide, through an act of cognition, a foundation for



the conditions under which a valid act of cognition can take place (Colletti 1973: 199). From this starting point two possible paths seem necessarily to follow. Either the formulation of a further external arbiter which could validate the procedures of the epistemological cognitive act itself, which would in turn be in need of external grounding; or the dogmatic utilisation of those very same criteria with which it attempts to found the original act of knowledge, in order to account for the objectivity of its own activity. Epistemology's own claims to truth seem to fall into the trap of either circularity or infinite regress (Arthur 1986: 50; Gunn 1989: 89-90). Faced with this dilemma, Kant ended up claiming that the only way out is humbly to recognise the limits of true human knowledge which thus becomes restricted to the phenomenal world, leaving the 'thing-in-itself' as an unreachable content for the act of cognition (Williams 1989: 32-8).

With his characteristic sarcastic tone, in the Introduction to the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel summarises very clearly the oxymoron that self-conscious traditional epistemology (which he saw in what he calls 'critical philosophy') had set for itself.

One of the main points of view in the *Critical Philosophy* is the following: before we embark upon the cognition of God, or of the essence of things, etc., we should first investigate our *faculty of cognition* itself, to see whether it is capable of achieving this. We should first get to know about the *instrument*, before undertaking the task that is supposed to be accomplished by means of it; for, otherwise, if the instrument is inadequate, then all further effort would have been expended in vain (...) But the investigation of cognition cannot take place in any other way than cognitively; in the case of this so-called tool, the

“investigation” of it means nothing but the cognition of it. But to want to have cognition *before* we have any is as absurd as the wise resolve of Scholasticus to learn to swim before he ventured into the water (Hegel 1991: 34)

This point was also made by Hegel in the Introduction to the *Science of Logic*. There he remarked on the specific nature of the science which had thought as its own particular content. For the rest of the sciences, method and subject matter are distinguished so that they are 'permitted to speak of their ground and its context and also of their method, only as premises taken for granted which, as forms of definitions and such-like presupposed as familiar and accepted, are to be applied straight-way, and also to employ the usual kind of reasoning for the establishment of their general concepts and fundamental determinations' (Hegel 1999: 43). However, logic, having those laws of thinking themselves as its own content, cannot presuppose them but needs to discover them itself in the course of its development. And yet this does not mean that no justification for the objectivity of pure thinking is needed. But this is not to be part of the science of pure thought itself but the presupposition of its beginning. This deduction, which is nothing more than the movement of consciousness itself until discovering the objectivity of its own cognising activity, Hegel had given in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1999: 49).

The point is that the whole problematic arises because epistemology starts from the radical *separation* between knowledge and reality, or subject and object of knowledge. Hegel's alleged solution was then to solve those contradictions by going right to their essential source in that deficient starting point of traditional epistemology. The general result of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* is precisely the



ontological *identity* between thought and being (Houlgate 1998; 2001). This is the essential content of absolute knowledge as the self-knowledge of absolute spirit's own dialectic. Certainly, Hegel does not extrinsically *confront* this essential truth with the allegedly wrong starting point of traditional epistemology in order to replace it with his own, more satisfactory account. This would leave him with exactly the same dilemma that traditional epistemology faced. The whole gist of his phenomenological method consists precisely in taking what he calls the standpoint of consciousness (i.e. that which sees a radical separation between consciousness and its object) as the starting point for his science of the experience of consciousness (that is Hegel's definition of phenomenology). More precisely, he starts from the simplest figure of that knowing subjectivity, i.e. immediate certainty. From this beginning, and through a method of *immanent critique* Hegel attempts to show that his own absolute knowledge is a necessary concrete form into which that simple initial figure of the knowing consciousness develops (on immanent critique in Hegel, see Hyppolite 1991). The phenomenology is the laborious odyssey of consciousness passing through all of its defective figures until reaching its plenitude as absolute knowledge. The crucial thing is that this development is not the product of the failure of the different forms of consciousness to measure up to some external yardstick provided by the philosopher, the alleged bearer of absolute truth. On the contrary, this motion is generated by the contradictions produced by each figure of consciousness itself when measured against its own standards. Although at first there seems to be a perfect identity between what consciousness takes to be the object in itself and the way it knows the object (i.e. the object for consciousness), a closer scrutiny of each figure's cognising experience reveals that those two moments are actually in opposition. It is the development of its own contradictions that pushes consciousness forward to ever

newer, more complex forms until reaching the stage of absolute knowing. In this sense, it is a process of philosophical self-education of ordinary consciousness. The philosopher does not teach ordinary consciousness the content of absolute knowing (the identity of thought and being) but just describes the self-movement of the latter through which it eventually grasps that essential truth by itself. The false is then revealed to be not simply 'wrong' but a partial view that results from the fixation and absolutisation of what actually is a determinate moment or appearance of a more comprehensive, concrete totality, namely: absolute spirit's self-development. At the end of the journey consciousness thus learns that the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity was posited by consciousness itself.

In this way, absolute knowing reveals that the externality between form and matter of cognition is an appearance that vanishes as soon as one comes to adopt its standpoint. Thus, according to Hegel, the problem of traditional epistemology is solved. The determinations of thought are not pure subjective forms that organise a given content but the immanent essential determination of everything that exists when grasped in its universality, that is, in the objectivity of its 'logical element'. Liberated from 'the opposition of consciousness', pure thinking recognises its own objectivity as the Notion, i.e. as

(...) the nature, the peculiar essence, that which is genuinely permanent and substantial in the complexity and contingency of appearance and fleeting manifestation, (...) the notion of the thing, the immanent universal (...) the very heart of things, their simple life-pulse, even of subjective thinking of them (Hegel 1999: 36-7).



On this basis, logic is thus free to proceed with the presentation of the self-determining movement of the Notion by showing the multiplicity of different thought-forms that structure being in all its complexity. However, after the reconstruction of the experience of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* it becomes evident for philosophy that this exposition of objective pure thinking cannot consist in the mere external 'aggregate of definitions and propositions which ordinarily passes for logic' (Hegel 1999: 51). This collection of external relations among the different thought-forms is, according to Hegel, the picture philosophy gets when it wrongly borrows its scientific method from the science of 'the quantitative aspects of the determinations' (Hegel 1999: 52), i.e. mathematics. Quite to the contrary, Hegel argues, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* he had already shown the workings of the 'scientifically correct method' as the ideal reproduction of the 'inner self-movement' of the object of cognition, which is governed by the 'dialectic which it possesses within itself' (see also 1977: 31-2; Hegel 1999: 54). That is, science must proceed by following 'the inner negativity of the determinations as their self-moving soul' (Hegel 1999: 56):

All that is necessary to achieve scientific progress — and it is essential to strive to gain this quite simple insight — is the recognition of the logical principle that the negative is just as much positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its particular content, in other words, that such a negation is not all and every negation but the negation of a specific subject matter which resolves itself, and consequently is a specific negation,

and therefore the result essentially contains that from which it results; which strictly speaking is a tautology, for otherwise it would be an immediacy, not a result. Because the result, the negation, is a specific negation, it has content. It is a fresh Notion but higher and richer than its predecessor; for it is richer by the negation or opposite of the latter, therefore contains it, but also something more, and is the unity of itself and its opposite. It is in this way that the system of Notions as such has to be formed — and has to complete itself in a purely continuous course in which nothing extraneous is introduced (Hegel 1999: 54).

Thus Hegel distinguishes between what he terms the ‘understanding’ and ‘speculative thought’. The former grasps thoughts as self-subsistent entities or immediate affirmations:

Thinking as *understanding* stops short at the fixed determinacy and its distinctness vis-à-vis other determinacies; such a restricted abstraction counts for the understanding as one that subsists on its own account, and simply is (Hegel 1991: 125).

Moreover, and this is what distinguishes understanding from mere ‘representation’, on that basis it attempts to establish ‘a necessary relation between the isolated determinations of representation – whereas representation leaves them *side by side*, in its undetermined space, linked only by the simple “and”.’ (Hegel 1991: 50) However, unwilling to recognise that ‘according to its proper determinacy (...), the dialectic’, or negativity, ‘is the genuine nature that properly belongs to the determinations of the



understanding, to things, and to the finite in general', the understanding can only end up establishing a connection among all those conceptions by means of purely *subjective* reflection, that is, by following a necessity which is *external* to the immanent determination of the object of cognition at stake (Hegel 1991: 128).

Conversely, speculative thought involves the consciousness both of the 'dialectical moment' present in all 'things [as they are] in and for themselves (Hegel 1991: 129) and, also, of 'the affirmative that is contained in their dissolution and in their transition' (Hegel 1991: 131). It therefore discovers in the dialectic 'the moving soul of scientific progression (...) the principle through which alone *immanent coherence and necessity* enter into the content of science' (Hegel 1991: 128). Speculative science thus grasps the relations among things in their objective, immanent necessity.

In this way, Hegel claims to have moved beyond the antinomies of philosophical thought. He sees himself as not only overcoming the externality between the form and content of knowledge but also as discovering in the dialectic the form in which the universality of the Notion moves, thus giving life and motion to every particular real form, whether natural or 'spiritual.' Thus seen, logic 'no longer stands as a particular alongside other particulars but includes them all within its grasp and is their essence, the absolutely True' (Hegel 1999: 59).

It is with these conclusions, according to Marx, that far from solving the dilemma of epistemology, Hegel carried the idealist inversion intrinsic to all philosophical thought to its limit. And this, in a two-fold sense. Negatively, he thereby unwittingly exposed the source of the idealist inversion inherent in philosophy in the replacement

of the movement of the real, i.e. its determinate immanent necessity, with a *logical necessity*. The content of the materialist inversion needed thus became clear, namely, the overcoming of all forms of *logical representation* of reality through the discovery of the *specific* necessity immanent in the *determinate* object of cognition (and hence of transformation) at stake, that is, through the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of thought'.<sup>21</sup> Positively, in discovering contradiction as the 'negativity which is the indwelling pulsation of self-movement and spontaneous activity' (Hegel 1999: 442) of every existing real form, Hegel grasped the dialectic as the *form* of cognition (i.e. the method) capable of expressing the aforementioned 'inner necessity controlling the object' to be known. *With these two insights in their unity*, Marx would begin his positive development of science determined as a necessary concrete moment of the revolutionary transformation of society into the free association of individuals.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Following Iñigo Carrera (2003), we shall use the expressions 'logical representation' or 'representational thought' to refer to the form of scientific or philosophical cognition that moves according to a purely ideal necessity, external to the real forms to be known. By the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of thought' or, simply, 'dialectical knowledge', we shall mean that form of science which grasps the necessity for self-transformation immanent in things themselves. They correspond to what Hegel respectively called 'understanding' and 'speculative thought', minus his idealist inversion.

<sup>22</sup> The reduction of the materialist inversion of Hegel to the latter insight only, generally coupled with the dogmatic claim that the subject of the movement described by Hegel's *Logic* is not the 'Idea' but 'Matter', does not move an iota beyond logical representation. It just formally changes an idealist *dialectical logic*, into a 'materialist' one, to be extrinsically applied to every determinate concrete form of material reality.



Even among the most lucid commentators of Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*, the section on the critique of the Hegelian dialectic is read primarily as an attempt to develop a materialist inversion of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this sense, Arthur's detailed commentary is a case in point.<sup>23</sup> According to this author, the essence of Marx's criticism consists in the inversion of Hegel's historical dialectic through the replacement of 'his Bildungsroman of spirit with that of man' (Arthur 1986: 56). Thus Marx is seen as part of the Young Hegelian tradition of critical appropriation of Hegel's thought. This involves the recognition that Hegel's dialectic expresses truth but in mystified form. Feuerbach's influence in particular consisted in that attempt to refer all that in Hegel belongs to that abstraction called 'Spirit' to real man as an objective, natural being. However, the argument goes, against the passivity and ahistoricity of Feuerbach's views about the human being, Marx recovered the 'active', productive and historical side contained in the Hegelian dialectic. Hence the latter's positive aspect of the 'dialectic of negativity as the producing principle' (Marx 1992b: 385-6). The self-development of Spirit through alienation and its overcoming is actually a mystified representation of the human being's self-production through labour (Arthur 1986: 60). The essential difference between Marx's and Hegel's account thereby lies in the concrete subject of the dialectic of negativity. Whilst for Hegel the subject of this activity is an abstraction called consciousness, for Marx, building on Feuerbach's criticism, it is the 'real, corporeal *man*, his feet firmly planted on the solid earth, and breathing all the powers of nature' (Marx 1992b: 389). In turn, around this question would revolve the difference in political stances towards

---

<sup>23</sup> But see also Markus (1980: 82-3).

capitalist society between Hegel and Marx. For the former, the overcoming of alienation does not involve the practical, real abolition of an alienated social world but only a change in the attitude of consciousness regarding those forms of objectivity.<sup>24</sup> In brief, in this reading the primary aspect of Marx's criticism of Hegel in the *Paris Manuscripts* concerns the question of the idealist character of the Hegelian dialectic of human consciousness. Moreover, this critique would have served Marx as a way of developing the central insight of his 'social ontology,' namely, the essentiality of *productive activity* in the historical development of human beings.

Although the relevance that this question about the idealism of *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* had for Marx's development *in those years* is beyond dispute, I think that a more fruitful reading strategy should focus not on the critique of that 1807 text but on Marx's confrontation with Hegel's *Logic*. And there are mainly two reasons for this. First, as was already discussed, although the question of productive subjectivity and its historical forms remained the essential element of Marx's materialist standpoint, the general dialectic of negativity as the foundation for

---

<sup>24</sup> Although we cannot address the question here, we would like to acknowledge the existence of a debate over the fairness of Marx's critique of Hegel. Thus Rose (1995: 214-5) has challenged Marx's reading of Hegel for being essentially Fichtean (see Arthur 1986: 74-6, for a reply to Rose; and Smith 1990b for a critique of Arthur). Other authors have also criticised Marx for not realising that, actually, there is no difference between Hegel's dialectic and his own (Fraser 1998: 34-6). Fine (2001: chapter 5) also argues that Marx failed to recognise the methodological affinity between his dialectical method and Hegel's. But, in addition, he explores the consequences of the misreading of Hegel for Marx's own thought. Be that as it may, the relevant point for this thesis is not whether Marx was right or wrong in his reading of Hegel but the positive methodological insights developed *through* the critique of the latter.



the overcoming of alienated labour was left behind in his later works. Secondly, that one-sided emphasis on the discussion of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* overlooks the fact that Marx's concern for that early text is subordinate to his critique of the *Science of Logic* as the consummation of Hegel's hypostasis of logic's ideal necessity.<sup>25</sup> Hence, according to our reading the significance of those pages for Marx's subsequent intellectual development is not so much 'socio-ontological' as *methodological*.

Certainly, Marx's initial entry point for the discussion of Hegel is the latter's abstract dialectic of absolute Spirit with its allegedly conservative result. After praising Feuerbach for positing nature and the human being - 'the self-sustaining positive' - as the starting points of his philosophy, he goes on to argue that it is for exactly the opposite reason that Hegel's dialectic is to be criticised. However, this critique should recognise that, albeit in an idealist form, Hegel had unconsciously discovered the general form of motion of the historical process through which the human being is produced. According to Marx,

---

<sup>25</sup> The only commentator that we are aware of who adopts this reading strategy of that section of the *Manuscripts* is Murray (Murray 1988: 46-7). However, he does not develop this in the methodological direction of the distinction between representational thought and dialectics. Instead, he uses it to put forward his own variant of the 'homology thesis', which sees a parallel between Hegel's logical concept and capital, inasmuch as they are both hypostasised abstractions indifferent to any qualitative distinction. On the 'homology thesis', see the debate between Chris Arthur (2003a; 2003b) - supporter of a strong version of the thesis, whereby the parallel between the Idea and Capital is not just general but applies to almost every single category – and Tony Smith (2001; 2003) – for whom the thesis does not stand close scrutiny.

Hegel has merely discovered the *abstract, logical, speculative* expression of the movement of history. This movement of history is not yet the *real* history of man as a given subject, it is simply the process of his *creation*, the *history of his emergence* (Marx 1992b: 382).

While in the conventional reading this quotation is read with an emphasis on Hegel's finding of the form of the 'movement of history,' we think that, conversely, the crux of the matter resides in Marx's emphasis on the 'abstract, logical, speculative' nature of Hegel's account. Thus Marx's praise of Hegel's discovery of the dialectic of negativity as the 'producing principle' should be qualified. The latter not only served Marx to reveal its material content in the dialectic of labour self-alienation but also gave a clear illustration of Hegel's speculative transformation of logic into the source of all movement and life. This is a crucial point. It exposes the procedure of philosophical representation consisting in the substitution of a mental, logical necessity for the real one. Instead of following the real movement of humanity's historical self-development and then discovering that, as far as its form is concerned, it moves according to a dialectic of negativity, Hegel sees the movement of real history only as an(other) instantiation of the logical principle of pure negativity.

Since this so-called negativity is nothing more than the *abstract, empty* form of that real living act, its content can only be a *formal* content, created by abstraction from all content. Consequently there are general, abstract *forms of abstraction* which fit every content and are therefore indifferent to all content; forms of thought and logical categories torn away from *real* mind and *real*



nature. (We shall expound the *logical* content of absolute negativity later.)

(Marx 1992b: 396-7)

This passage shows with utmost clarity the point which Marx is getting at and of which the discussion of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* constitutes a prelude, namely, the alienated nature of philosophy. That is why Marx wants to take stock of Hegel's philosophy in its entirety, which, inasmuch as he sees it as the most developed form of philosophical consciousness, entails a critique of philosophy *tout court*. In this sense, as Murray points out, Marx's 'concern for Hegel's *Phenomenology* must be understood in terms of the attention to his logic [of absolute idealism]' (Murray 1988: 46). As Marx makes clear right at the beginning of that section of the *Manuscripts*, the critique of Hegel should aim at his philosophical *system* as a whole, as presented in the *Encyclopaedia*, since it is that work which condenses the essence of philosophical thought as alienated thought thinking itself.

Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* begins with logic, with *pure speculative thought*, and ends with *absolute knowledge*, with the self-conscious, self-comprehending philosophical or absolute mind, i.e. superhuman, abstract mind. In the same way, the whole of the *Encyclopaedia* is nothing but the *extended being* of philosophical mind, its self-objectification; and the philosophical mind is nothing but the estranged mind of the world thinking within its self-estrangement, i.e. conceiving itself abstractly (Marx 1992b: 383)

On the other hand, it is to be remembered that Hegel's *Phenomenology* is not part of his *system* but constitutes its *introduction* (Houlgate 2003: 368-70). This is why Marx states that the critique of Hegel's philosophy as a whole 'must *begin* with his *Phenomenology*, which is 'the true birthplace and secret of the Hegelian philosophy' (Marx 1992b: 383, our emphasis). Hegel considers the *Phenomenology* the work that leads consciousness from its immediate mode of existence to the essential determination of absolute knowledge in the identity of thought and being. In this way consciousness recognises that its thought-determinations are not something different from the determinations of objects existing independently 'out there' but that its own thinking about itself *is* the thinking about the determinations of being. In the words of a contemporary Hegel scholar,

What consciousness comes to understand at the end of the *Phenomenology*, therefore, is the Kantian idea that the determinations of being are in fact the determinations of consciousness, together with the un-Kantian idea that the determinations of consciousness are the determinations of *being* (Houlgate 2001: 135)

It is only once consciousness has gone through that journey that lands it on the realm of absolute knowledge that proper philosophy can actually begin by reconstituting the path from the abstract determinations of being to its most concrete forms of existence as Spirit. To put it differently, abstractly considered, a consciousness that for whatever reason does not hesitate a second about the identity between thought and being, could easily skip the phenomenological experience and move straight to the starting point of the system of philosophy which begins with the *Logic* (Houlgate



2003: 368). Hence Marx's critique of Hegel's false starting point with an abstract consciousness, the philosophical representation of the real, corporeal human individual. Because that possibility demonstrates that far from moving from the sensuous concrete to the abstract, Hegel's philosophical standpoint never abandoned the realm of abstraction. The alienated essence of philosophy is precisely exposed by its systemic starting point with logic, the science of pure thinking. In particular, the idealist inversion appears with full force in the problematic of the transition from the logical idea to nature. The autonomisation of thought-forms from nature and consciousness in the form of pure logical categories and their further integration as moments of the logical Idea reaches its moment of truth when faced with its self-determination as its 'other'. Here Marx resorts to a Feuerbachian line of criticism. The difficulties of that transition betray the absoluteness of Hegel's Idea and actually constitute a proof that abstract, presuppositionless thought is nothing without nature.

Hegel's positive achievement in his speculative logic is to present *determinate concepts*, the universal *fixed thought-forms* in their independence of nature and mind, as a necessary result of the universal estrangement of human existence, and thus also of human thought, and to comprehend them as moments in the process of abstraction (...) But the abstraction which comprehends itself as abstraction knows itself to be nothing: it must relinquish itself, the abstraction, and so it arrives at something which is its exact opposite, *nature*. Hence the whole of the *Logic* is proof of the fact that abstract thought is nothing for itself, that the absolute idea is nothing for itself and that only *nature* is something (Marx 1992b: 397).

What makes this metaphysical transition from the idea to nature necessary is precisely the fact that during the whole movement of the idea in its purity (the *Logic*) no particular, determinate content was touched upon. Only the general, the logical, the essentialities or thought-determinations were developed, which, because of their generality, are said to structure all forms of the real. But the abstraction reached in this form cannot but long for a particular content, otherwise abstract thought would keep revolving around itself. And this would mean the recognition of its non-absolute character, since its other (nature) would persist in its independence and 'otherness'. Thus the need to bring nature in. However, says Marx, alienated thought can only acknowledge nature as a thought-entity. Its existence is the last logical necessity of the absolute idea in its purity, which, to demonstrate its absoluteness, has to self-posit itself in the form of externality, i.e. as nature.

(...) this whole idea, which conducts itself in such a strange and baroque fashion, and which has caused the Hegelians such terrible headaches, is purely and simply *abstraction*, i.e. the abstract thinker; abstraction which, taught by experience and enlightened as to its own truth, resolves under various conditions - themselves false and still abstract - to *relinquish itself* and to establish its other-being, the particular, the determinate, in place of its self-pervasion [*Beisichsein*], non-being, universality and indeterminateness; to let *nature*, which it concealed within itself only as a mere abstraction, as a thing of thought, *issue freely from itself*, i.e. to abandon abstraction and to take a look at nature, which exists *free* from abstraction (Marx 1992b: 397-8).



The philosopher, who, as pure thinker, sees him/herself as the ultimate incarnation of the human, is actually the ultimate incarnation of the alienated existence of the human. Inasmuch as he/she sees his/her own species-being (that is, his/her specific determination as a labouring natural being) as the very negation of true humanity (Fracchia 1991: 155-7), he/she can separate thought from concrete, real thinking man and consider it as the attribute of an abstractly pure thinking subjectivity. Thought-forms are thus transformed into categories of pure thinking, which moves according to its own mental necessity and is therefore indifferent to every natural (and hence human) determination. In other words, thought-forms are turned into *logical categories* and their movement into logic. In this abstract universality, thought-forms are thus seen to express the ideal necessity of reason in its purity, uncontaminated by the contingency of particular contents. While different philosophers tended to privilege this or that group of pure thought-forms as the essential logical categories, Hegel synthesised them all in his *Logic* as the science of pure abstraction. This is one of the ways in which, according to Marx, Hegel represented the ultimate expression of philosophical thought. But additionally, as we have already noted, Hegel pushed the idealist inversion to a complacent self-awareness and hence, to its plenitude. Certainly in a mystified form, philosophers before Hegel had still preserved some link between thought and the human being. To be more precise, an alienated, abstract representation of the human being as a purely thinking subject. But Hegel went one step further and completed the severance of thought from the human subject, the result of which could only be their reunion in an inverted form, that is, with the process of thought turned into an independent subject itself (Marx 1976a: 102).

The man estranged from himself is also the thinker estranged from his *essence*, *i.e.* from his natural and human essence. His thoughts are therefore fixed phantoms existing outside nature and man. In his *Logic* Hegel has locked up all these phantoms (Marx 1992b: 398).

And in a footnote Marx adds,

We shall see later why Hegel separates thought from the *subject*; but it is already clear that if man is not human, then the expression of his essential nature cannot be human, and therefore that thought itself could not be conceived as an expression of man's being, of man as a human and natural subject, with eyes, ears, etc., living in society, in the world and in nature (Marx 1992b: 389).

It is the difficult and painful transition from pure thought to nature (difficult for the abstract thinker, that is) which exposes the speculative trick. Because now all the logical categories repeat themselves in the movement of nature, that is, not in their purity but in the form of externality. Hence, the philosopher involuntarily reveals that those abstract logical categories which he sees himself as engendering by himself through his pure thinking activity, are in fact specific determinations of nature (matter) which he had abstracted from the latter and, by giving them the form of an abstract universality, transformed them into pure thought-forms. The subsequent necessary return to nature can only produce an inverted image of nature, that is, as a dead materiality which has life, movement and meaning only as a mode of existence



of the logical concept. In other words, the philosopher does not deal with real nature but with a thought-entity.

But *nature* too, taken abstractly, for itself, and fixed in its separation from man, is *nothing* for man. It goes without saying that the abstract thinker who decides on intuition, intuits nature abstractly. Just as nature lay enclosed in the thinker in a shape which even to him was shrouded and mysterious, as an absolute idea, a thing of thought, so what he allowed to come forth from himself was simply this *abstract nature*, nature as a thing of thought — but with the significance now of being the other-being of thought, real, intuited nature as distinct from abstract thought. Or, to put it in human terms, the abstract thinker discovers from intuiting nature that the entities which he imagined he was creating out of nothing, out of pure abstraction, in a divine dialectic, as the pure products of the labour of thought living and moving within itself and never looking out into reality, are nothing more than *abstractions* from *natural forms*. The whole of nature only repeats to him in a sensuous, external form the abstractions of logic (Marx 1992b: 398-9).

Marx's critique of Hegel's *Logic* in the final section of the *Manuscripts*, and especially the transition from the Logical Idea to Nature, is crucial to grasp Marx's revolution in the mode of science. Because in the course of his engagement with Hegel he becomes aware of the source of the idealist inversion of which all representational thought suffers for being condemned to remain a concrete form of the reproduction of capital (i.e. uncritical alienated thought). And the key to this critique does not simply reside, as *Diamat* would have it, in the fact that Hegel sees the Idea as the subject of the

dialectic, so that the inversion would consist in leaving his dialectic intact and dogmatically claiming that the subject is nature or matter. There is no doubt that all that exists (human thought included) is a more or less developed concrete form of matter, resulting from the latter's self-movement through a process of differentiation, that is, through the production of qualitative differences. The only alternative to this would be a creationist view. Now from a communist perspective, that point, however valid, is a self-evident truism. Already in Marx's time the atheist standpoint was well-established in the workers' movement so that, as he states in the *Manuscripts*, it already constituted a basic presupposition of revolutionary science.

Atheism, which is the denial of this unreality, no longer has any meaning, for atheism is a *negation of God*, through which negation it asserts *the existence of man* through this negation. But socialism as such no longer needs such mediation (Marx 1992b: 357).

But as this passage also makes clear, proletarian science does not come down to atheism. Or, more precisely, the revolutionary science of the working class does not even need such a mediation, since 'its starting point is the *theoretically and practically sensuous consciousness* of man and of nature as *essential beings*' (Marx 1992b: 357). Hence, the *philosophical* quarrels within Russian Marxism over the question of the primacy of thought or matter in the process of knowledge, which is nothing but the disguised secular form of the classical theological question (Marx 1992b: 381), were not only scholastic but peculiarly anachronistic ones. As an expression of the backward nature of the Russian process of capital accumulation, those essentially ideological forms could not, as German criticism in Marx's time, but 'be preoccupied



with the old world' (see also Pannekoek 1948: chapter 7; Marx 1992b: 379). Later, when the Stalinist regime completed the dogmatic codification of Marx's revolutionary science through its conversion into an official state ideology, that anachronistic emphasis on the materialist *philosophical world-view* as the distinguishing mark of proletarian science was taken even further. That distinction was used to legitimise the use of state violence against those who personified the working class resistance to that absolutely centralised process of exploitation.

Coming back to our point. The importance of Marx's critique of Hegel's *Logic* in the *Paris Manuscripts* does not consist in opposing a materialist philosophy to Hegel's absolute idealism. The crux of the matter resides in the fact that, through the critique of Hegel, Marx came to grips with the essential difference between representational thought, as the uncritical form of alienated consciousness, and the reproduction of the concrete by means of thought as the form of revolutionary science. Hegel's logic exposed without ambiguity the source of the idealist inversion present in logical representation in all its expressions, whether scientific or philosophical. In a sense, the distinction between the idealist and the materialist standpoints was relevant for Marx. However, it did not pertain to two different 'philosophical outlooks' but was embodied in the very form of the process of cognition, in the mode of scientific knowledge. The point Marx is getting at is that the idealism of logical representation springs from its replacement of the determinate movement of nature and history with a mental construction, structured on the basis of a logical necessity. The latter, by its own nature as a subjective reflection, can only remain external to the particular natural or social forms at stake. Behind the need to provide an external mental necessity to put real forms into 'theoretical relation' rests the assumption that those forms are

incapable of establishing relations by themselves. In other words, that those forms are lifeless abstractions which therefore do not embody any qualitative potentiality or determinacy whose realisation involves its self-transformation into another, more concrete form. As already mentioned, this is what Hegel discovered as the flawed procedure of what he called the 'understanding', which represented real forms as a universe of indifferent and self-subsistent entities. Devoid of any immanent necessity driving them to self-movement, real forms can only be put into *external* relation by means of subjective reflection. Against this view, Hegel opposed the reproduction of the immanent movement of real forms or dialectical cognition as the scientifically correct method. However, for Hegel this did not involve the transcendence of logical thought. On the contrary, it involved the elevation of logic, the science of pure thinking, to the status of *the* science par excellence. For although he claimed the correct form of science to be the reproduction of the 'inner life' of the determinate object of cognition, the original source of that movement did not lie in those particular real forms themselves but *in their determination as concrete modes of existence of pure logical thought-forms*. The latter are the ones which posit life into what would otherwise be lacking in meaning and inner movement. In the words of Marx,

In the natural form, superseded Movement as Matter corresponds to superseded Becoming as Being. Light is the *natural* form of *Reflection-in-itself*. Body as *Moon* and *Comet* is the *natural* form of the *antithesis* which, according to the *Logic*, is *the positive grounded on itself* and the *negative grounded upon itself*. The Earth is the *natural* form of the logical *ground*, as the negative unity of the antithesis, etc.



*Nature as nature*, i.e. insofar as it is sensuously distinct from the secret sense hidden within it, nature separated and distinct from these abstractions is *nothing*, a *nothing proving itself to be nothing*, it is *devoid of sense*, or only has the sense of an externality to be superseded (Marx 1992b: 399).

In discussing Hegel, the issue at stake for Marx was not the philosophical question of whether matter determined thought or vice versa, but the distinction between logic, which was 'completely indifferent to all real determinateness' (Marx 1992b: 383) and the reproduction in thought of that 'real determinateness' as it unfolds in nature and history. And here it is important to point to a subtle but crucial difference between the critique of Hegel's *Logic* in the *Paris Manuscripts* and in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. At first sight, they seem to come down to the same essential point. According to Marx, whether in the case of nature or the state, Hegel inverts their specific movement as an instantiation of the logical movement of the concept. Whilst this is true enough as far as the negative view of Hegel's idealistic inversion is concerned, this similarity of the critique between the two texts overlooks their difference regarding Marx's positive view on what was to replace Hegel's 'applied metaphysics.' Indeed, there is a substantial leap in the *Paris Manuscripts* compared with the criticism raised a year before in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Iñigo Carrera 2003). In this latter work Marx opposed to Hegel's claim of generality for his logical concept ('the matter of logic'), the necessity to develop 'the logic of the matter' (Marx 1975a: 18). By contrast, in the *Manuscripts* Marx no longer distinguishes between a *general ideal* necessity and a *particular ideal* necessity. He realises that the relevant distinction is that between the ideal necessity *tout court* –

logic - and the determinate movement of the real. In this way, he criticises philosophical representation in all of its forms. In other words, the clear distinction between the latter and dialectical cognition was not present in the 1843 critique. So much so, that, as we have seen, in 1843 Marx still saw his work as philosophical and revolution as the realisation of philosophy. In 1844, he came to see philosophy as the epitome of representational thought, as abstract thinking or alienated thought that thinks itself. Hence, emancipation cannot be the realisation of philosophy but its annihilation.

On the other hand, in 1844 Marx started to come to grips with (or at least made explicit) something which he seemed to have overlooked in the 1843 critique regarding the 'rational kernel' to be recovered from the Hegelian dialectic. As we have seen, Hegel was aware of what was at stake in the development of the 'scientifically correct method', namely, the overcoming of the externality between the ideal necessity of thought and the inner life of the object of scientific cognition characteristic of the 'understanding'. Notwithstanding the inverted nature of his proposed solution, the fact remained that he was the first thinker not only to pose the problematic and attempt at a solution explicitly, but also to discover the *form of scientific cognition* with the power to overcome that externality, namely, the



dialectic.<sup>26</sup> Many years later, Marx gave recognition to this revolutionary aspect of Hegel's thought in the oft-quoted passage from his Postface to the second German edition of *Capital*:

The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell (Marx 1992b: 103)

However, our claim is that this rediscovery of the rational kernel in the distinction between the *representation* of reality and the *ideal reproduction in thought of the movement of the real* began to take shape already in 1844, precisely through the critique of the inverted solution put forward by Hegel. Against the latter's *absolutisation* of logic by giving it the form of the dialectic, Marx searched for the

---

<sup>26</sup> The fact that in 1843 Marx did not acknowledge the centrality of the dialectical method for the overcoming of the exteriority between thought and the inner movement of the subject matter, can be seen from his permanent insistence on the externality between them obtaining from Hegel's dialectical mode of presentation. What Marx never mentions is that, although the result of Hegel's attempt at developing the concrete determinations of the modern state might have been a failure, at least he was aware of the general form that such an enterprise would take. Namely, the dialectical presentation of the inner movement of modern political forms. In this sense, it is remarkable that in the 1843 critique Marx did not engage with the Preface and the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel addresses explicitly the question of the specificity of the dialectical method vis-à-vis the scientific *representation* of reality characteristic of the understanding (Fine 2001: chapter 5).

*overcoming* of logic by giving the revolutionary science of the proletariat precisely that general form discovered by Hegel.

The fact that this was the key issue in, and main result of, Marx's critique of Hegel's *Logic* becomes evident when we analyse the direction that Marx's subsequent work took in *The Holy Family*, *The German Ideology* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*. In those texts, Marx directed his criticism at the vulgar version of Hegel's thought as represented by both the Young Hegelians and Proudhon. As we shall see in the following chapter, through the discussion of Marx's critique of Proudhon, the main point of his attack, ceaselessly made throughout those pages, was that the latter (as much as the Young Hegelians), instead of reconstructing in thought the real movement of history and bourgeois society, replaced the latter with an ideal, logical necessity. To this question we now turn.



## **Chapter 3. Marx on Proudhon: The critique of dialectical *logic* and the political determination of science as practical criticism**

### **Introduction**

As much as his critique of the Young Hegelians, the central aim of Marx's critique of Proudhon was eminently political. In actual fact, one could say that the latter was even 'more' political than the former. This is not just because of the nature of the critique but because of its historic-political significance. While, in the last instance, the critique of the 'True Socialism' of the Young Hegelians remained within the boundaries of a discussion among a small circle of radical 'intellectuals,' the critique of Proudhon involved a political intervention right at the heart of the dominant ideological form of the continental workers' movement as a whole. As Shortall notes, Proudhonian socialist ideas had a strong grip among the artisans and craftworkers who composed the great bulk of the working class at that time in continental Europe (Shortall 1994: 36-8). On the other hand, by that time Marx and Engels had already made their first contacts with the existing forms of socialist activism and politics in London and Paris and were attempting to get involved in the organisational aspects of the immediate political action of the working class of their time (Shortall 1994: 36-8). Hence the political urgency of Marx's text.

However, from the perspective of Marx's scientific development, the significance of that polemic against Proudhon went beyond his immediate political concerns. As we

shall see, three main interrelated questions emerge from Marx's critical engagement with Proudhon's works. First, Marx made explicit that the materialist inversion of the Hegelian dialectic entailed more than the overcoming of its speculative nature, through its application to the 'material questions' of political economy. This approach can only lead to the conversion of the dialectic into a *logic* and, therefore, remains within the uncritical alienated realm of representational thought. Thus we encounter again the crucial *methodological* significance of Marx's text. Secondly, in *The Poverty of Philosophy* Marx attempted for the first time positively to unfold the reproduction in thought of the real movement of capitalist economic forms. Albeit in a rudimentary form, this represents Marx's first attempt at a dialectical critique of political economy. In turn, the latter is revealed as the necessary scientific form of the proletarian consciousness that gives course to the practical critique of capital. Thirdly, as a necessary corollary of this, science ceases to be an abstractly contemplative enterprise. Marx's critique of political economy is not meant to provide another economic theory of bourgeois society, albeit from the perspective of the working class. From that very moment, Marx's scientific endeavour constituted an attempt at the positive investigation of the social determinations - and hence necessity - of the different forms of the political action of the workers aiming at the radical transformation of the capitalist mode of production. In brief, we shall see that the question of the 'scientifically correct method' turns out to be not of an abstractly epistemological interest but is of a directly political nature. Let us now turn to the discussion of each of these aspects of Marx's polemic against Proudhon.



## **The dialectical method as logic in Proudhon**

The first two sections of Marx's text comprise a reconstruction of Proudhon's arguments about the basic economic categories such as use-value, exchange-value and money. The gist of Marx's critique comes down to the following two aspects. In the first place, he demonstrates a lack of originality of Proudhon's ideas. In order to counter the latter's self-proclaimed originality, Marx resorts to some quotes from the classical political economists, particularly from Ricardo, and demonstrates that the assertion that economists failed to deal properly with the 'opposition' between use-value and exchange-value is plainly false. In all this there is nothing particularly original in Marx's development itself and, fundamentally, he bases his economic analysis on the theories of the Ricardian school.

In the second place, Marx criticises Proudhon's absurdities about the opposition between an allegedly ethically ideal determination of value in labour-time and its empirical determination through the contending wills of buyer and seller, which would lead to the deviation from the former due to the social power of direct exchangeability monopolised by money. According to Proudhon, it is not the exchange of commodities as such which lies at the basis of the capitalist exploitation of labour but only its distorted concrete form of operation leading to unequal exchange. Therefore, Marx points out, Proudhon's deficient critical engagement with political economy actually justifies his ideological view of socialism as the realisation of the ideas of justice and equality springing from the determinations of the commodity-form itself. Again, in order to refute Proudhon's assertions Marx does not offer any original analysis and limits himself to the claim that, far from being the law

regulating the negation of present-day society, the 'law of value' actually is the adequate expression of the movement of social labour in its capitalist form.

Ricardo shows us the real movement of bourgeois production, which constitutes value. M. Proudhon, leaving the real movement out of account, "fumes and frets" in order to invent new processes and to achieve the reorganization of the world on a would-be new formula, which formula is no more than the theoretical expression of the real movement which exists and which is so well described by Ricardo (...) Ricardo's theory of values is the scientific interpretation of actual economic life; M. Proudhon's theory of values is the utopian interpretation of Ricardo's theory (Marx 1976c: 123-4).

In this judgement, he basically cites approvingly the political economists, only adding the critical insight that these social forms do not represent the absolute realisation of human individuality but its enslavement in alienated forms. In this sense, the realisation of the determinations of the 'law of value' can hardly be the basis of the emancipation of the workers.

Thus relative value, measured by labor time, is inevitably the formula of the present enslavement of the worker, instead of being, as M. Proudhon would have it, the "revolutionary theory" of the emancipation of the proletariat (Marx 1976c: 125).

In brief, in these first pages we find nothing significantly novel in Marx's critique of Proudhon. The interesting insights emerge when Marx turns to the discussion of the



scientific source of the limitations suffered by Proudhon's critical approach to political economy. This source, Marx argues, is to be found in the defective way in which Proudhon tried to appropriate Hegel's dialectic in order to deal with the subject matter of political economy. The gist of Marx's attack against Proudhon is that far from developing a dialectical critique of political economy, the latter offers merely an idealist reconsideration of economic categories by subjecting them to an extrinsic application of the categories of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. According to Marx, then, the source of Proudhon's idealism lies in his reduction of the dialectic to another *logical method*, a ready-made set of formal rules of thinking to be applied to the object of cognition at stake or, more precisely, to the theoretical representations of it. Marx characterises Proudhon's account in the following way:

Economists explain how production takes place in the above-mentioned relations, but what they do not explain is how these relations themselves are produced, that is, the historical movement which gave them birth. M. Proudhon, taking these relations for principles, categories, abstract thoughts, has merely to put into *order* these thoughts, which are to be found alphabetically arranged at the end of every treatise on political economy. The economists' material is the active, energetic life of man; M. Proudhon's material is the dogmas of the economists (Marx 1976c: 162).

Note how Marx emphasises the importance of reproducing in thought the real movement of production relations instead of dealing with the 'categories' of political economy in an allegedly 'dialectical' fashion. According to Marx, the economists at least take as their starting point the confrontation of the real movement of economic

forms, that is, they face the 'active, energetic life of man.' Yet they do so not to ideally reproduce the real movement but to construct a *theoretical representation* of it. In other words, what the political economists lack is a grasp of the 'inner connections' between the different forms of social relations. This because they lack the 'genetic' approach of the dialectical method that is needed to account for the movement through which 'these [social] relations themselves are produced.'

It is precisely this genetic approach that Proudhon claimed to be developing regarding the subject matter of political economy. But Marx's point is that that was far from being the case. The reason for this is that Proudhon did not take the necessary starting point of any dialectical investigation, namely, the confrontation of the concrete forms of social reality themselves. Instead, Proudhon's 'dialectical' critique took as its starting point the 'dogmas of the economists.' And what he then did was simply to reorder those 'categories' according to allegedly dialectical criteria and relations, giving the *appearance* of a dialectical presentation. In other words, Proudhon uncritically took the economic categories, 'which are to be found alphabetically arranged at the end of every treatise on political economy', and reorganised them according to a 'dialectical logic' (Marx 1976c: 162). What in Hegel was developed with the profundity characteristic of great thinkers making real discoveries (namely, the general form of motion of the dialectical method), in Proudhon led to an unhappy marriage of 'bad philosophy' and 'bad political economy' (Marx 1976c: 162: 109). Moreover, what in Hegel was justified in its own terms (that is, his engagement with pure thought-forms or categories) given an explicit idealism which saw logical forms as the essentialities of things, led Proudhon to antinomies and absurd conclusions. In other words, the problem with Proudhon is not the construction of an idealist



speculative dialectic, but the fact that he did not offer even that. He just provided a reformulation of theses already formulated by the political economists in a dialectical jargon, utilising logical categories and forms of argument taken from Hegel's *Logic*. Marx's point is that, instead of a critique of political economy, Proudhon develops just another form of 'applied metaphysics,' in which the specific movement of economic relations is seen as an immediate expression of the abstract form of the logical movement.

It is important to highlight that Marx did not object to the emphasis on the self-movement of real forms as the lesson to be drawn from Hegel. As evidenced by the following passage, Marx accepted that the most general determination of all reality is that it *moves*.

All that exists, all that lives on land and under water, exists and lives only by some kind of movement. Thus, the movement of history produces social relations; industrial movement gives us industrial products, etc. (Marx 1976c: 163).

Understood dialectically this can only mean that reality is contradictory, the movement of contradiction. In turn, we would like to argue that, for Marx, this can only mean that, in its simplest form, it is the affirming through self-negation of real forms. Still, it is true that in the above passage Marx just argues that real forms exist through some kind of movement but does not explicitly say the general form that that movement takes. However, in another text of the same year Marx reiterated that insight about all real forms realising their determination through movement (or what

he in this case called 'development'), but now specifying its general form, namely, the affirming through self-negation. Hence he states in *Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality*.

Any development, whatever its substance may be, can be represented as a series of different stages of development that are connected in such a way that one forms the *negation* of the other. If, for example, a people develops from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy, it *negates* its former political being. In no sphere can one undergo a development without negating one's previous mode of existence (Marx 1976b: 317).

But if the movement of contradiction is the 'rational kernel' that Hegel had discovered, what is wrong with the 'application' of this insight to the 'categories' of political economy? Precisely, the idea that we are before an absolute *logical principle* that needs to be *applied to theoretical categories*, instead of the general form of motion of the real which we ideally grasp in the *specificity* of the particular different forms of 'all that exists.' In other words, what Marx criticises is the conversion of that simple truth regarding the general form of motion of reality into a logical category, in order to then account for every specific movement by recourse to this most abstract determination. This means that there are no basic or general principles of thought (the unity of opposites, the negation of the negation, the transformation of quantity into quality and so on) to be followed in order to *represent* reality more accurately than through formal logic. Contradiction simply means that every real form (whether natural or social) realises its qualitative determination by transforming itself into a more concrete form, that the process of determination is a process of becoming



another. As the form of movement, the 'inner life', of the concrete object that we want to appropriate by means of thought, it has to be followed in its specific modes of existence and development. This is why, for instance, Marx's *Capital*, as a critique of political economy, is not (*pace* Engels) an application of dialectical logic to political economy, but the ideal reproduction of the real determinations of capital as the alienated social subject of bourgeois society, starting with its simplest mode of existence, i.e. the commodity. In short, although contradiction is the general form of movement of reality, this is not a general axiomatic principle which is unmediatedly 'applied' to whatever concrete form we are facing. In fact, and despite Marx's own usage, we think that the very term 'application' should be dispensed with altogether when referring to the development of dialectical cognition. The dialectical method is concretely *set into motion* on each occasion we want to appropriate in thought the determinations of a concrete subject matter, in order to realise through our own transformative action the potencies immanent in the object of cognition at stake. Dispensing with the mediation of the latter in the name of correct methodological *rules* is precisely what reduces everything to applied metaphysics.<sup>27</sup> According to Marx, that is what Hegel and Proudhon did.

---

<sup>27</sup> An attentive reader should have already realised that the champion of that inversion is *Diamat*. In it, all the elements of the idealist inversion just discussed are present. First, the transformation of dialectics into logic, that is, a collection of rules of thought – a mental necessity – that differs from formal logic by its acceptance of the existence of contradiction. Secondly, the conversion of these abstract and basic rules of thought into metaphysics, by dogmatically asserting that they are a reflection of the determinations of matter. This is the line of thought that claims that the Marxian inversion of the Hegelian dialectic consists in the mere replacement of the Hegelian Idea with the category of Matter. Against Hegel's idealist *philosophical world view*, *Diamat* puts forward a materialist *philosophical world view*. Therefore, by transforming dialectics into logic, *Diamat* then unmediatedly applies its

Just as by means of abstraction we have transformed everything into a logical category, so one has only to make an abstraction of every characteristic distinctive of different movements to attain movement in its abstract condition — purely formal movement, the purely logical formula of movement. If one finds in logical categories the substance of all things, one imagines one has found in the logical formula of movement the *absolute method*, which not only explains all things, but also implies the movement of things (...) All things being reduced to a logical category, and every movement, every act of production, to method, it follows naturally that every aggregate of products and production, of objects and of movement, can be reduced to a form of applied metaphysics. What Hegel has done for religion, law, etc., M. Proudhon seeks to do for political economy (Marx 1976c: 163-4).

---

*representation* of the more abstract determinations of matter into its more concrete forms of existence. This instead of reproducing in thought the way in which the abstract forms of matter develop into more concrete forms precisely by *transforming* themselves, i.e. by a process involving several mediations. Hence *Diamat's* objectivism and naturalisation of the social world. Yet, the critique of this vulgar materialism should not take the form, as happens with Western Marxists, of a severing of the link between natural and social forms, by declaring that contradiction, the affirming through self-negation or self-movement only belongs to the latter. All this raises a question, namely: how the most abstract determination of reality as the movement of contradiction is discovered. In other words, we still need to address the question of the necessity of determination itself. We cannot address this issue here. But we shall only point out that it can never be a dogmatic metaphysical starting point but the result of the process of analysis which constitutes the first stage of a dialectical investigation which always has the question of the conscious organisation of human action as its starting point. On this see Iñigo Carrera (2003).



In this idealist reduction of concrete movements to the logical form of movement, the transitions and relations between forms are justified by recourse to the logical necessity of the abstract form of movement, thus replacing the specific real necessity with general ideal ones. From its determination as the reproduction in thought of the real movement of things, method becomes, firstly, transformed into a logic. Secondly, if we are to be consistent to eliminate the exteriority between form and content of knowledge, method becomes hypostatised as the force which insuflates movement to things (as, according to Marx, happened with Hegel).

But this is not all. In a sense, here Marx seems to be just repeating the critique of logical representation we have already discussed. And yet we think that this further formulation throws new light on the methodological question. First, because, as we have shown above, these passages make clear the all-important centrality of both Marx's insight that dialectical cognition consists in the ideal reproduction of the real movement of contradiction *and* his awareness of the risks of transforming the latter into another logical principle. This awareness, and the difficulties involved in their avoidance, would accompany Marx throughout the rest of his intellectual development of the critique of political economy. This is revealed, we think, by the explicit (albeit occasional) remarks he made about it, the reworking to which he subjected the crucial chapter one of *Capital*, and his eventual refrain from the publication of some pages with a summary of the general form of his method (Murray 1988: 109). Furthermore, we think that Marx had then no doubts about the source of the risk of relapsing into a logical representation. Namely, the reduction of the dialectical method to the formal way in which we deal with the *theoretical categories* through which representational science grasps real forms or, alternatively, which the

dialectical logician constructs in the manner of representational thinking. In the case of Hegel, this was not really a problem, since he self-consciously considered that dialectical cognition should tackle the movement of pure thought-forms as the prelude and source of movement of real forms. But in the case of Proudhon, who attempted to develop a materialist account of the genesis and movement of economic forms of bourgeois society, it turned out to be quite problematic and actually led him to the most absurd contradictions and, eventually, to the most idealist of inversions.

Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production, M. Proudhon, holding this upside down like a true philosopher, sees in actual relations nothing but the incarnation of the principles, of these categories, which were slumbering — so M. Proudhon the philosopher tells us — in the bosom of the "impersonal reason of humanity" (Marx 1976c: 165).

The central objection that Marx is raising against Proudhon is that he does not deal with the forms of capital themselves - i.e. 'the social relations of production' - but with the 'economic categories' through which political economy represents them - i.e. 'the theoretical expressions.' Interestingly, as we have already pointed out in a previous chapter, that was precisely the methodological limitation of the *Paris Manuscripts*. But here Marx is unambiguous about the lesson he had drawn from those shortcomings of the 1844 text. The dialectical critique of political economy could not take the categories of political economy as ready-made, given presuppositions to constitute the starting point of an investigation. In other words, the critique of political economy does not consist in an allegedly more sophisticated logical treatment of



categories, definitions, etc., found in previous theories, the greater sophistication springing from the use of a dialectical logic instead of a traditional one. Quite to the contrary, it entails the confrontation of economic forms by oneself in order to provide a fresh new ideal reproduction of the determinations immanent in them with the purpose of consciously acting upon them and thereby effecting their transformation.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Needless to say, this does not exclude the critical study of other authors as part of the process of tracing out the inner connections between economic forms, as a question of self-clarification in the process of inquiry. But our point is that the aim guiding the dialectical investigation of bourgeois economic forms is not the solution of the antinomies of the science of economics (Althusser and Balibar 1968) but the production of a novel science, the critique of political economy, which, *additionally*, 'solves' the scientific questions left unresolved by the former. The so-called 'transformation problem' is a typical case in point. With respect to this question, Marx did not try to solve the theoretical conundrum of classical political economy, namely, the relation between 'value' and 'price.' In the same vein, the problem for contemporary critics of political economy is not to prove that Marx was right or to correct him by providing an alternative, 'logically-consistent' solution to the 'theoretical problem' of the relation between value and price. The point is to develop the totality of the determinations of the forms of capital as the alienated subject of social life in order to find our revolutionary action as the necessary form in which capital produces its own annihilation. In this process we would certainly find that the law regulating the exchange of commodities when seen in their most abstract determination as simple products of (privately performed) labour, negates itself as such when their most concrete determination as products of capital is discovered and followed into its further concrete forms. This would reveal that the law regulating the exchange of commodities takes on, as its own immanent necessity, a different concrete form when the latter is discovered in its concrete existence as an exchange of products of equally valorised individual capitals (Iñigo Carrera 1995). That is, of individual capitals affirming their unity as aliquot parts of total social capital - as a *class vis-à-vis* the workers (Iñigo Carrera 1995; Arthur 2002a). As a necessary moment of its development, this process of dialectical cognition would lay bare the real relations between the value of commodities and its concrete form of existence as price of production beyond the antinomies at which political economy arrives through its representation of those relations. However, this would not be the

We think that the crucial point Marx is getting at is exactly the same as the one made many years later in his last economic writing, the *Notes on Adolph Wagner's "Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie"*.

In the first place [*De prime abord*] I do not start out from 'concepts', hence I do not start out from the 'concept of value', and do not have to 'divide' these in any way. What I start out from is the simplest social form in which the labour-product is presented in contemporary society, and this is the 'commodity' (Marx 1975b: 198).

In opposition to this standpoint, Proudhon did proceed from 'concepts' or 'categories' and, therefore, inevitably reduced the dialectic to another empty formal methodology, used to give the appearance of a dialectical movement to the former, in turn uncritically taken from the political economists. Marx's later judgement about Lasalle's similar attempt at expounding political economy in the manner of Hegel is perfectly applicable to Proudhon as well. That is, the latter did not realise either that 'it is one thing for a critique to take a science to the point at which it admits of a dialectical presentation, and quite another to apply an abstract, ready-made system of logic to vague presentiments of just such a system' (Marx 1983: 261).

In addition to this first aspect of Marx's critique of *dialectical logic*, which, as it were, deals with the 'logical' bit of the expression, we can find in the *Poverty of Philosophy*

---

aim of that development but, as it were, a secondary 'by-product.' As a 'theoretical problem,' the so-called transformation of value into prices of production is a scholastic abstraction of representational science.



another crucial aspect of the question related to the 'dialectical' bit. Whilst the first one has been occasionally highlighted by the most elaborated commentaries on Marx's scientific method,<sup>29</sup> the latter has been generally overlooked.<sup>30</sup> We are referring to the transformation that the real movement of contradiction suffers when *represented* through a *dialectical logic*. In the case of those forms of representational thinking which structure themselves following a traditional formal logic, the problem does not even arise. That is, since they start by excluding the contradictory character of reality as the elemental rule guiding their representations, the conscious attempt to ideally appropriate its movement does not even form part of its agenda. But quite different is the case of those forms of thought explicitly accepting the reality of contradiction and

---

<sup>29</sup> The works by Murray (Murray 1988) and Meikle (Meikle 1985) are perhaps the most sophisticated in this respect, although we part company with the idiosyncratic conclusions developed by them from that correct initial insight about Marx's rejection of formalistic methodologies. For instance, we cannot agree that what follows from that insight is the conception of Marx's novel mode of scientific knowledge as involving a new relation between science and *morality* (Murray), or as involving a *philosophy* that prioritises ontology over epistemology (Meikle). Marx's revolution in the mode of cognition transcends both morality and philosophy in all of its forms. Still, among its merits Meikle makes a crucial point rarely found among Marxists, namely: that in Marx there is no such a thing as 'dialectical logic'. See especially Meikle (1979). Precisely for this reason, and in spite of its otherwise thought-provoking quality, we find unsatisfactory much of the recent literature on the dialectical method coming from that broad current within Marxism grouped under the name 'new dialectics' and which makes use of Hegel's *Logic* to make sense of the dialectical exposition in capital. Despite their own recognition of the inseparability of content and form of knowledge, one could argue that these authors run precisely the risk we have highlighted of turning the dialectical method into a general logic to be applied to an external content. See, among others, Arthur (2002b), Reuten and Williams (1989), Tony Smith (1990a; 1993), Uchida (1988) - although not formally associated with the others - and, from the Uno School, Albritton (1999) and Sekine (1997).

<sup>30</sup> On the following point I am indebted to Iñigo Carrera (1992; 2003: 222-3)

which therefore try to grasp its movement. And it is of this perspective that Proudhon is a case in point. For what he attempted to develop is precisely the 'system of economic contradictions.' Yet we would like to argue that the relevance of Marx's critique of this aspect of Proudhon's thought goes beyond this specific author. For the claim that the superiority of dialectics consists in its ability to deal conceptually with the contradictory nature of reality (natural and social for some, only social for others) has been a trademark of most currents of Marxist thought since its inception. The question is what do these authors understand by reality being 'contradictory.' And the point we want to make is that Marx's critique of Proudhon throws light on the way in which, when dialectic is reduced to a form of logic, contradiction and its movement are grasped through a *representation* of them. In what does, according to Marx's critique of Proudhon's 'metaphysics of political economy,' the representation of the movement of contradiction by *dialectical logic* consist? In order to answer this question, let us take a look at the way in which Marx characterises the depiction of contradiction by Proudhon.

Let us see now to what modifications M. Proudhon subjects Hegel's dialectics when he applies it to political economy.

For him, M. Proudhon, every economic category has two sides — one good, the other bad. He looks upon these categories as the petty bourgeois looks upon the great men of history: *Napoleon* was a great man; he did a lot of good; he also did a lot of harm.

The *good side* and the *bad side*, the *advantages* and *drawbacks*, taken together form for M. Proudhon the *contradiction* in every economic category.



The problem to be solved: to keep the good side, while eliminating the bad  
(Marx 1976c: 167).

If we set aside the specificities of Proudhon's particularly crude conception, consisting in the mere enunciation of a good side and a bad side in each economic category, we can get a more general point regarding the representation of contradiction by dialectical logic. In a nutshell, the latter grasps the contradictory nature of things as consisting in being the *unity or interpenetration of opposites*. In this sense, it claims to go beyond formal logic since it accepts that the real determinations of things cannot be grasped through a single attribute since they are the embodiment of antithetical determinations. But does it? In other words, is it in this form that we can appropriate in thought the inner life of the subject matter at stake, overcoming the appearance of externality through which the relation between real forms presents itself? In order to answer this question, let us recall the objective basis for the appearance of externality between real forms.

In its immediate manifestation, reality appears as a universe of unconnected real forms. In this sense, every real form appears as a self-subsistent entity, and the realisation of its determination as an immediate affirmation. This appearance is not a subjective misconception but the necessary form in which the inner connections between real forms appear when the process of determination is externally grasped in its immediacy. That is, when we obviate the mediations that make a real form a concrete mode of existence of the necessity of another, more abstract form. Since, as Marx stated regarding the relation between commodities and money, 'the intermediate steps of the process vanish in the result and leave no trace behind' (Marx 1976a: 187),

the objective illusion arises that 'those intermediate steps' do not exist at all. Hence, real forms of different degrees of concreteness appear as co-existing side by side without any real necessity linking them in a determinate fashion. In brief, the representation of the world through formal logic grasps the *movement* of affirmation through self-negation that constitutes the determination of real forms only in its result, sticking to the appearance of externality between an abstract form and its necessary concrete mode of existence (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 247-8).

Now, the following question arises. Does the representation of real forms as a unity of opposites characteristic of dialectical logic overcome that manifestation of exteriority between them? It is our claim that it does not. For the difference between dialectical logic and formal logic actually comes down to the fact that the former does not represent real forms as isolated entities but always finds each of them as 'necessarily' associated with another one which, it claims, is its 'contrary'. However, this does not mean that the indifference between them has disappeared. Because the fact that each form is represented as coexistent with its opposite does not change the fact that each real form still continues to be seen as an *immediate* affirmation and so does their unity. But the *specific movement* that *mediates* the existence of 'all that exists on land or under water', and which constitutes the immanent connection between different real forms, continues to be beyond the comprehension of this alternative form of logical representation. The unity that is thereby grasped continues to be completely extrinsic. It is *a unity between two opposing immediate affirmations* which, at most, 'interpenetrate in a relation of struggle'. But each of the poles of that unity does not carry within itself the necessity of its own self-transformation. That is why, again, movement is not seen as the immanent necessity characterising every real form but



needs to be insulated by the ideal necessity of logic. Hence, it is only the subjective reflection of the dialectical logician that leaps from one pole to the other generating only the 'shadow of movement' which pushes cognition forward. As much as formal logic, dialectical logic is therefore impotent to reproduce the real movement in thought and represents real forms as motionless abstractions.

It is important to emphasise that we are not rooting for the replacement of one absolute logical principle (unity of opposites) with another, allegedly superior one (affirmation through self-negation). And yet we are aware that, confined to this abstract level, our discussion might give the false impression that this is the case. But our point is just that when cognition fails to reproduce in thought the *specific* necessity for self-negation immanent in a determinate real form it inevitably ends up representing the former movement as a unity of opposites.<sup>31</sup> Hence, in order to demonstrate this point fully, the general discussion of how dialectical logic represents the movement of contradiction through the unity of opposites remains insufficient. We should therefore proceed by showing concretely how this inversion takes place in the case of the determinations of a specific concrete form. However, that is not the path that we shall follow in the rest of this chapter. The reason for this is that a satisfactory way of addressing the question would require that we run too much ahead in the main argument of this thesis concerning Marx's discovery of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. We shall therefore deal with that issue in the following

---

<sup>31</sup> It is important to remark that this reduction of dialectics to logic is not restricted to those Marxists who explicitly treat the former as a formalistic methodology or who self-consciously refer to their or Marx's method as involving a dialectical logic (even if this is understood in a non-formalistic way). No matter the stated intentions of the author, that inversion results once the ideal reproduction of the specific contradictory movement of the object of cognition at stake is abandoned.

chapters, in which we will illustrate our critique of dialectical logic by taking a look at the different social forms taken by the modern alienated social subject. Moreover, and in order to show the political nature of what at first sight might seem a purely scholastic question, we shall also deal with the relevance of all this for the comprehension of the social determinations of the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat.

We prefer for the moment to leave the discussion at this abstract level and move on with our reconstruction of the way Marx advanced in his revolution in the mode of scientific cognition. And we think that the next crucial step Marx made in that direction through the criticism of Proudhon was making explicit the practical character of a truly dialectical critique. That is, in discussing the question of workers' strikes and combinations Marx showed very clearly that the new science that he was in the process of developing was of an eminently political nature. In short, what was at stake in his investigation was the conscious organisation, i.e. the discovery of the social necessity, of the political action of the working class.

## **Marx on Proudhon II: Dialectical knowledge and political action**

In the previous section we dealt with the methodological significance of Marx's critique of Proudhon as a critique of dialectical logic from the perspective of a materialist dialectical *method*. However, we have already mentioned that this engagement with Proudhonian socialism entailed other aspects that we regard as crucial in the development of Marx's thought. These additional aspects, which also



pertain to the specific mode of Marx's scientific thinking, and which expose without ambiguity the inherently political character of the methodological question, we find synthesised in Marx's discussion of workers' strikes and combinations. This question, together with Marx's insights on the adequate way of tackling it, illustrates very clearly the distinctive features of dialectical scientific thought as practical criticism. On the other hand, we shall see that Marx's own treatment of the question at that time was rather rudimentary and, in this sense, unsatisfactory as a way of displaying the plenitude of the critical and revolutionary powers of the critique of political economy. And yet we will show that those very limitations of Marx's scientific development also prove to be illuminating (albeit in a negative way) of the immediately practical nature of science in its dialectical form. Moreover, those limitations also provide an indication of the direction that Marx's thought subsequently took. That is, we can read the incompleteness of Marx's critique of political economy as programmatic for his mature works.

What triggered Marx's polemic against Proudhon was the latter's 'political indifferentism' concerning industrial action over wages and revolutionary action in general. Regarding the former, and as an expression of his economic analysis which denied the practical operation of the determination of value by labour-time in capitalist society, Proudhon saw it as completely useless. This because he concluded that the only result of an increase in the nominal wage would be an increase in the price of the means of subsistence of the labourers, thereby leaving the real wage (i.e. the conditions of reproduction of the workers) intact. Regarding revolutionary action aimed at obtaining 'political supremacy,' Proudhon rejected it too, preferring 'to burn property by a slow fire, rather than give it new strength by making a St

Bartholomew's Night of the property owners' (cited in McLellan 1973: 160). For him, the most potent form of political activity available to workers was not their revolutionary action upon the alienated forms of their social being in order to effect their transformation in the direction of their self-annihilation. According to Proudhon, those social forms should be left alone. Conversely, the energies of the workers had to concentrate on building the alternative socialist schemes devised by socialist theoreticians. Hence Marx's sarcastic comment,

The Socialists want the workers to leave the old society alone, the better to be able to enter the new society which they have prepared for them with so much foresight (Marx 1976c: 210)

That is, Marx criticised Proudhon for thinking that workers could escape their general social relation and implement alternative socialist schemes of mutual aid in the 'interstices' of this society. The abolition of capital would then be the result of the slow but progressive spread of these schemes 'by example' (Shortall 1994: 36).<sup>32</sup>

The aim guiding Marx's polemic was, therefore, the nature of the political action of the working class. The question at stake was the provision of scientific grounds for his political position concerning the content and form of proletarian action antagonistic to



capital. In other words, what this controversy shows is that for Marx the starting point of his scientific development was not an abstractly theoretical discussion of economic categories (for instance, the wage) but the transformative action of the working class. Thus, this specific controversy exposes a more general feature of the dialectical method. Namely, what sets into motion the dialectical investigation is the answer to the question of the form that we must give our transformative action in order to 'change the world'. As practical criticism, science thereby consists in giving that transformative action a fully conscious form. This means that what draws our attention to a particular concrete form is not an abstract desire for knowledge. If we face a concrete form of reality as an object of scientific cognition it is because it can affect us when realising its own determinations or, more importantly, because we can realise the potentialities it embodies through the actualisation of the potentialities of our action. The discovery of the relation between those two potencies in the totality of its determinations (i.e. the real necessity of transformative action beyond any appearance) is the generic aim of dialectical cognition (Iñigo Carrera 1992). In brief, to transform or to be transformed; that is the question.

In the concrete case Marx was facing, the relevance of the first concrete form at stake in the discussion with Proudhon (the wage-form) was almost self-evident. That is, even a superficial observation of the movement of wages revealed the way in which it

---

<sup>32</sup> One could argue that there is a striking similarity between the Proudhonian understanding of the abolition of capital and the contemporary Autonomist Marxist view - widespread among some social movements associated with, for example, 'Social Centres' in Italy - that revolutionary activity is about the micro or molecular politics of experimental construction of 'autonomous spaces of freedom' (Wright 1995/1996; Krasivyyj 1996; Negri and Guattari 1999: 73-80) or, alternatively, about 'exodus' from capital, i.e. from the alienated *general* social relation of present-day society (Virno 1996).

could affect (i.e. transform) the social existence of the workers. The question to answer was, therefore, what is to be consciously done in relation to wages? What form should workers give to their action to transform a determinate concrete form they were facing (to begin with, the quantitative transformation of the wage). Should they struggle? Should they co-operate in that struggle, i.e. organise themselves? Or should they refrain from political action and harmoniously and unconditionally submit their will to that of the capitalist since wages are not determined by their political action or the will of the capitalist, but through the operation of the laws of political economy? Or should they not combine since at any rate any real rise in wages eventually dissolves as an effect of a correspondent increase in prices? Furthermore, assuming that they definitely need to form combinations, should their conscious association stop at the level of an individual capitalist firm or at the level of a branch of production? Or should the struggle against the capitalists become general and, therefore, take the form of a *class action and, therefore, a general political action*? The need to tackle these questions in a fully conscious manner (i.e. dialectically) is evidenced by the reactionary political conclusions that emerge when they are addressed by a form of scientific consciousness, such as that of economists and utopian socialists, that stops at the immediate appearances of real relations. In particular, the appearance of externality between the laws that regulate the 'regular process of industry' and the struggles of workers through the formation of 'combinations'.

According to the economists, wages are determined by the eternal laws of political economy and, among them, by its most sacred, i.e. the law of supply and demand. Moreover, combinations breach the main condition under which those laws can



harmoniously operate in their purity, i.e. 'competition', and therefore act as an external disruption of the otherwise smooth workings of the economic process, thus leading to crises, the introduction of machinery and a further reduction in wages. Hence, the economists conclude, workers' struggles are not only ridiculous but also dangerous for the preservation of their own living conditions (Marx 1976c: 209). Thus was the advice of the spokespersons of the bourgeoisie.

For his part, Proudhon not only followed the economists in the rejection of combination for its lack of actual influence on the real wage, but also for its impotence to *substantially* alter the form of social relations. No matter how much they struggle, Proudhon's argument went, 'workers will continue nonetheless to be workers, and the masters will continue to be masters, just as before' (Marx 1976c: 210). Hence, instead of futilely wasting their energies in organising their struggle against capitalists, workers should devote themselves to the peaceful implementation of fair utopias based on the eternal principles of human reason, leaving the movement of the wage to the unjust laws of political economy.

As stated above, Marx's reply to the objection to working class 'combinations' by both Proudhon and the economists shows at the same time the insights he was developing regarding the role of science as the conscious organisation of proletarian political action, and the limitations of his approach, given the preliminary stage at which his development of the critique of political economy was.

Regarding the former, it is interesting to note how Marx tackled the question by attempting to overcome, through the conscious reproduction of the relevant

determinations at stake, the appearance of externality between 'the laws of political economy' (i.e. the movement of capital accumulation) and the political action of workers (i.e. the class struggle). This involved, in the first place, the dialectical sensitivity to grasp the inner connection between what to the ideological consciousness appeared as absolute opposites, namely: competition and direct association in the relation among workers. For the logical representation of both the economists and Proudhon either one or the other operated in capitalist society. For the former, the atomistic relations of competition between commodity-owners were the essence of the 'pure' laws of capital accumulation, whose smooth operation could not but be disrupted by what was a clear attempt to impose some sort of 'monopsonic' conditions in the sale of labour-power. For his part, Proudhon agreed with the economists on the natural character of competition, since, as an 'economic category,' it must be just another incarnation of the 'impersonal reason of humanity.' The problem resided, according to him, in the distorted way in which it operated in bourgeois society and which brings about the 'bad side' of competition. Far from attempting to negate through their political action the atomistic relations in which they find themselves, workers should try to recreate them but in pure form, through the implementation of alternative schemes 'outside' bourgeois society. The establishment of relations of direct solidarity between workers in their struggle over the wage was seen by Proudhon not only as impotent to really affect the level of wages, but as playing no role in the radical transformation of bourgeois society.

Against these two views, Marx came up with the discovery that far from being absolute opposites, competition and association were necessary forms that the relations among workers took as concrete forms of the movement of their alienated



general social relation, i.e. the accumulation of capital. That is why, 'in spite of both of them, in spite of manuals and utopias, combination has not yet ceased for an instant to go forward and grow with the development and growth of modern industry' (Marx 1976c: 210). In other words, what Marx is getting at is that the relations of solidarity among workers are not the abstract negation of their competitive relations but the concrete form in which the latter develop as a result of their own movement. On the one hand, competition is actually the most general social relation characteristic of the mercantile nature of bourgeois society, 'which is association founded on competition' (Marx 1976c: 194). On the other hand, inasmuch as it develops large-scale industry, it is the very result of the movement of competition to produce the necessity of its own negation, namely, 'combination'.

Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance — *combination* (Marx 1976c: 210)

On the other hand, the direct association between workers does not represent the *elimination* of relations of competition between commodity owners. It just polarises the latter into two antagonistic classes of commodity owners, capitalists and workers.

Thus combination always has a double aim, that of stopping competition among the workers, so that they can carry on general competition with the capitalist. If the first aim of resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups as the

capitalists in their turn unite for the purpose of repression, and in the face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages (Marx 1976c: 210-1).

In brief, what Marx is getting at is that it is in the nature of the laws of motion of the present form of social being (and not a distortion of it) to engender the necessity of the collective political action of workers through the formation of associations. In this sense, workers cannot abstractly *choose* not to do it. As personifications of their alienated social being, they are *compelled* to associate by the very conditions in which they are reproduced and, as Marx continues, they will eventually and inevitably *expand the scope and transform the aim* of their association.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, he makes clear that the objective potency to succeed in that struggle does not spring from the abstractly self-determining will of the proletariat but from the objective determinations of the reproduction of the specifically capitalist social relations of production ('competition'). So much so that the result of its struggle eventually crystallises in the only form in which the general conditions of social reproduction can impose themselves as an alienated attribute of capital, namely, as a legal regulation by the capitalist state.

In England, combination is authorized by an Act of Parliament, and it is the economic system which has forced Parliament to grant this legal authorization.

In 1825, when, under the Minister Huskisson, Parliament had to modify the

---

<sup>33</sup> And yet, as we shall see in the second part of the thesis, that alienated social necessity to establish relations of solidarity in the sale of labour-power, which the workers must personify, is mediated by their *apparently* free will.



law in order to bring it more and more into line with the conditions resulting from free competition, it had of necessity to abolish all laws forbidding combinations of workers. The more modern industry and competition develop, the more elements there are which call forth and strength combination, and as soon as combination becomes an economic fact, daily gaining in solidity, it is bound before long to become a legal fact (Marx 1976c: 209).

Thus far, we have reconstructed the way Marx replied to the objections of the economists and Proudhon to the collective industrial action of the workers. From the point of view of *method*, the important point to highlight is that the form of his reply was to develop (albeit in a rudimentary and insufficient way) the scientific consciousness of the real determinations of the workers' trade-union struggles so as to become aware of their *necessity*.

Now, even if necessary as a form of political action, the question remains as to whether it has any role to play in the overcoming of capitalist society. In this sense, it is important to remember that Proudhon's opposition to that form of political action did not only come down to its futility regarding the quantitative movement of wages but also, and more importantly, involved its rejection as a valid form of attempting to go beyond capital.

Again, we see Marx's way of putting the question as exemplary of the dialectical form of tackling any concrete form as an issue concerning the political action of the class. For although Marx grasped the social necessity of trade-union action, he also realised that it was limited in its *immediate* transformative potency: in its simplest

determination, it can only produce a quantitative change of the wage-form but not a substantial qualitative transformation of it, i.e. its abolition. Hence the need for workers' political action to transcend that limited form and Marx's subsequent 'phenomenology of class struggle' leading to the revolutionary conquest of political power in the rest of the text. However, Marx did not just extrinsically *counterpose* the different forms of political action of the proletariat, confining trade-union action to the realm of reformism, in turn seen as the abstract opposite of revolutionary action. As we mentioned above, dialectical cognition must provide the necessity of the transformative action of the workers in the *totality* of its determinations. And seen from a 'world-historical' perspective, the political action of the proletariat is the unity of its different necessary moments until becoming produced as a fully conscious revolutionary action with the power to abolish capital through the construction of the free association of individuals.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, the struggle over wages and working conditions, along with the formation of trade-unions as its adequate organisational form, is seen by Marx as one of those necessary moments in the historical production of the fully developed revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat (Marx 1976c: 210-2). On the other hand, we shall see that it is precisely on that point that the insufficiency of Marx's positive development of the critique of political economy at that stage was more strongly felt. For, in actual fact, in this text Marx did not provide a dialectical exposition of all the determinations involved in the different forms of

---

<sup>34</sup> Thus the traditional opposition between reform and revolution misses the point. The common understanding of those two terms is the ideological representation of different moments of the progressive transformations of capitalism towards the free association of individuals personified by distinct forms of the political action of the working class, which emerges when we abstract those transitions from its concrete determinations. From a dialectical standpoint, what is always at stake is precisely the recognition of the necessity of a determinate form of political action as a concrete form in which capital develops and, therefore, moves towards its dissolution through the conscious revolutionary activity of the proletariat. This recognition involves the discovery of the concrete determinations of each form of political action, which would show their respective transformative power in its determinacy, that is, both in its potentiality and the limitations to that potentiality.



political action of the workers necessary for its production as fully conscious revolutionary action. Quite to the contrary, he just offered no more than an impressionistic description of the concrete history of the workers' movement in England, which he extrapolated and generalised as *the* historical tendency of the working class as a whole.

However, in all fairness to Marx, it is important to point out that his insights into the determinations of proletarian action went a little further. For, in relation to the particular case of trade-union action, Marx was already aware that its determinations were not exhausted in being an active force in the quantitative transformation of the wage-form. As we can see from the following passage, the former's transformative power exceeded the mere quantitative change in the wage-form:

In England, strikes have regularly given rise to the invention and application of new machines. Machines were, it may be said, the weapon employed by the capitalist to quell the revolt of specialized labor. The *self-acting mule*, the greatest invention of modern industry, put out of action the spinners who were in revolt. If combinations and strikes had no other effect than that of making the efforts of mechanical genius react against them, they would still exercise an immense influence on the development of industry (Marx 1976c: 207).

That is, even if in its simplest determination the result of trade-union action is limited in its transformative power to quantitative variations of the wage, Marx was already aware that it also carried within itself a further mediated potentiality. Namely, the determination of strikes as 'triggers' of technical innovations such as the introduction

of machinery or, to put it differently, the determination of the class struggle as a progressive active force in the development of the material productive forces of society. In this sense, the transformative powers of proletarian struggle also entailed the transformation of the wage-form through the *qualitative* mutation of the material conditions of social labour and, therefore, in the social form of existence of the productive subjectivity of the workers themselves. But this determination as such did not involve the *immediate* production of the conditions for the social constitution of the fully conscious revolutionary subjectivity. However, Marx already knew that it was in the very nature of capital constantly to revolutionise the material conditions of social labour. And if we take those two insights together, a necessary conclusion follows which reinforces the social necessity of proletarian struggle. In short, the latter is not only the way in which they can put a limit to the fall of wages below subsistence level (and in this unsatisfactory way Marx saw the determination of wages at that time - more on this below), but also the form in which they force capital to produce the conditions for its supersession, i.e. the development of the material productive forces of society.

An oppressed class is the vital condition for every society founded on the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society. For the oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself, it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be capable of existing side by side. Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself. The organization of revolutionary elements as a



class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society (Marx 1976c: 211).

We can see how Marx's science as practical criticism allowed him to discover how the class struggle is also determined as an active force in the production of the material conditions under which it will be produced as the personification of the historical necessity to abolish capital. Moreover, Marx insists against Proudhon that this transformation can only take place in the determinate concrete form which the latter rejected, namely: 'through the organisation of the revolutionary elements as a class'.

Thus far we have focused on the advances made by Marx in his development of the dialectical cognition as the most potent form of organisation of the political action of the working class. However, it should be obvious that at that time that development was still rudimentary, in its very early stages. Therefore, Marx was very far from accomplishing what we claimed he had become aware *needed to be done*: the positive conscious development of the determinations of capital. Certainly, as we tried to show with our previous discussion, Marx had produced certain discoveries that allowed him to go beyond the 'utopianism' of Proudhon. But it should be noted that these were actually more like discrete insights whose real determinations and inner connections were still beyond Marx's horizon. Thus it would be more accurate to say that Marx only *hinted* at the discovery of the social necessity of the different forms of political action of the workers which aim at revolutionising capitalist society.

That this is the case is revealed by Marx's subsequent intellectual development immediately after *The Poverty of Philosophy*. The next scientific endeavour on which Marx embarked was an attempt to deepen his understanding of the determinations of wages and the necessary connection between their movement and the struggles of the workers through the formation of associations. This materialised in the manuscript edited as 'Wages', which formed the basis of Marx's lectures on the subject in Brussels published in 1849 as *Wage-Labour and Capital*. This betrays the fact that Marx himself was aware of the limits of the analysis he had provided in those years. In fact, in the preliminary words to *Wage-Labour and Capital* Marx explicitly acknowledges his deficit and states that it is the purpose of that work to cover it.

From various quarters we have been reproached for neglecting to portray the economic conditions which form the material basis of the present struggles between classes and nations. With set purpose we have hitherto touched upon these conditions only when they forced themselves upon the surface of the political conflicts...But now, after our readers have seen the class struggle of the year 1848 develop into colossal political proportions, it is time to examine more closely the economic conditions themselves upon which is founded the existence of the capitalist class and its class rule, as well as the slavery of the workers (Marx 1977: 197).

Marx then states he attempts to explain the economic conditions upon which the class struggle, already 'proved' empirically in 1848, is based. And we take him to mean that he was going to develop the concrete determinations behind the necessity of the class struggle, the task that he had begun in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. And yet this first



conscious attempt at a systematic presentation of the determinations of capital as the adequate form of the critique of political economy would also prove insufficient. In a nutshell, the conclusion that Marx draws regarding his analysis of the determinations of wages is that they have a tendency to fall as the result of the movement of the accumulation of capital. This he grounds in terms of the effect of the detail division of labour on the value of labour(-power), the displacement of labour brought about by the introduction of machinery and the inclusion of female and child labour which, in turn, increases the competition among labourers (Marx 1977: 227). He then moves to another effect of the movement of capital accumulation which is to intensify its crisis tendencies. In turn, crises result in the further degradation of the living conditions of workers since they increase the competition among them, thus putting the burden of their consequences upon the shoulders of the workers (Marx 1977: 228). Certainly, when seen from the perspective of the analysis offered in *Capital*, this appears as a completely one-sided account which centres on workers whose productive subjectivity becomes degraded through capital's development of the system of machinery. As an account of the necessity of class struggle this work is still unsatisfactory. Marx seems more concerned to show the negative impact of capitalist development upon the living conditions of the working class than to provide a thorough analysis of the concrete determinations of the movement of wages and the role of the class struggle in that movement. Marx seems eager to provide a stronger foundation for the direct confrontation with those who claimed that there was some sort of harmony of interests between workers and employers. If the unchecked imposition of the will of the capitalist class leads to those degraded conditions, the working class cannot submit itself unconditionally to the interests of the capitalists but must affirm its own, antagonistic interests. The necessity of the struggle and the

formation of associations is seen just as a way of preventing wages from falling even below the ever decreasing 'minimum' or, when possible, to temporarily raise them above it. This account was still miles away from the one offered in *Capital*, where the question entails the distinction between labour and labour-power, between the price and the value of labour-power, the determination of the latter as an expression of the concrete materiality of the productive subjectivity of the labourers determined by the forms of production of relative surplus-value, and so on.

These shortcomings are even more marked when considered in relation not just to the necessity of that limited form of the class struggle but to the development of the conscious revolutionary subjectivity of the workers. According to Marx, the associations are not just a means for the struggle over wages. More generally, they also serve to bring workers together and to constitute themselves as a class against the bourgeoisie. That is, it is the way in which their competition turns into its opposite, direct or conscious association. And this conscious collective action is the form that the revolutionary activity of the working class must take. Therefore, Marx sees these associations as a necessary 'training ground' for the revolutionary struggle of the class which would emerge under determinate material conditions (which capitalist development itself brings about, as he notes in the section that follows called 'Positive aspect of wage labour').

If in the associations it really were a matter only of what it appears to be, namely the fixing of wages, if the relationship between labour and capital were eternal, these combinations would be wrecked on the necessity of things. But they are the means of uniting the working class, of preparing for the



overthrow of the entire old society with its class contradictions (...) And if in their moments of philanthropy Messrs the bourgeois and their economists are so gracious as to allow in the minimum wage, that is, in the minimum life, a little tea, or rum, or sugar and meat, it must by contrast appear to them as shameful as incomprehensible that the workers reckon in this minimum a little of the costs of war against the bourgeoisie and that out of their revolutionary activity they even make the maximum of their enjoyment of life (Marx 1976g: 435).

It is to be noted that implicit in this account is the rather simplistic view that the revolutionary subjectivity of the workers is the result of the 'accumulation of experience of struggle,' a kind of quantitative extension of the trade-union struggle. Marx does not offer here a proper ground for this view. He just wants to say something about the transition between non-revolutionary and revolutionary forms of working-class subjectivity in order to show the transitory nature of capital. But in light of the lack of a proper account of the concrete determinations of the latter, he can only offer a general statement based on the abstract self-development of the consciousness of the workers which is indifferent to the social determinations producing the different forms of working class subjectivity.

In this sense, Marx did not advance much from the 'phenomenology' of organisational forms of the class struggle he had already offered in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Initially, workers organise just in the form of combinations. But then, this merely 'economic' form of the class struggle takes increasingly political forms. In a passage we have already quoted, Marx states:

But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance — *combination* (...) If the first aim of resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups as the capitalists in their turn unite for the purpose of repression, and in the face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages (...) In this struggle — a veritable civil war — all the elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character.

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle (Marx 1976c: 210-1).

The first remarkable point of this passage is the presence of the distinction between 'class in itself' and 'class for itself.' But note as well that this distinction does not refer, as is generally interpreted, to the fully conscious revolutionary forms of the class struggle, but to the class struggle in general. The class constituted as a class 'for itself' just means the class affirming its essential antagonistic relation to the bourgeoisie through the political action of its members, whatever the form the latter takes. So it does not necessarily imply a fully developed revolutionary proletariat



consciously transforming capitalist society into the free association of individuals through its self-abolition as a class. Secondly, it is true that Marx makes a distinction between forms of the class struggle that do not take a political form and political struggles. But note that not only does he not refer to the former as merely 'economic' but he also makes clear how class struggle in a political form is a necessary form towards which the embryonic non-political forms of struggle tend. Thus these passages clearly go against the Leninist rigid separation between economic struggles and political struggles, the former developing spontaneously but the latter needing the external intervention of a revolutionary vanguard. That is why that quote has often been used by defenders of so-called 'spontaneist' accounts of the development of revolutionary subjectivity (along the lines of Luxemburg) to make a case for their anti-Leninist position (Müller and Neusüss 1975). However, although those approaches are right in their criticism of the Leninist separation between economic and political struggles, they are wrong in identifying Marx's reference to the political character of the struggle with its revolutionary form. When Marx refers to the 'political struggle' between the two classes he refers to the class struggle in general, not just to its revolutionary form. Its political character derives from the following interrelated points. Firstly, it objectively reaches the universality of the members of the class. Secondly, it transcends the confrontation with capitalists within the boundaries of individual capitals or restricted groups of them within branches of production, to become directly centred on the struggle over the form of political representative of social capital, i.e. the state. In this way it becomes determined as the form through which the directly general conditions of social reproduction are established (Marx 1965). 'Non-political' forms of the class struggle are, for Marx,

those first manifestations of the class struggle in which the proletariat had not affirmed itself yet as a class with an independent political representation.

Be that as it may, it is clear that the inadequacy of this early formulation of the question by Marx paves the way for all this confusion. In particular, taken at face value Marx's formulation can certainly be read as a kind of 'Luxemburgist' approach based on an 'accumulation-of-experience-through-struggle' theory of revolutionary subjectivity. Briefly put, for that approach revolutionary subjectivity is the product of the 'self-development' of class consciousness in the course of the struggle against capital, a potentiality which is carried by any form of the class struggle. While it is evident that the different (antagonistic) forms of class consciousness can only develop through the political actions of the workers against capital, this does not mean that class struggle as such is the self-determining ground for the production of revolutionary subjectivity. In fact, the picture of working class consciousness as set into motion by itself, now growing, now retreating, - that is, as essentially self-moving - is the one we get when externally grasped in its apparent concrete forms. Only as an expression of determinate material conditions does proletarian struggle acquire a conscious revolutionary form. This is what Marx makes clear immediately after the quoted passage when he states that 'the organization of revolutionary elements as a class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society'. However, this is no more than a very general statement, which does not do much as an account of the qualitatively specific form that those productive forces must acquire, or of the historical process that begets them, including the role of the different forms of proletarian political action in it.



Clearly, then, Marx's investigation of the concrete determinations of the political action of the working class, i.e. the critique of political economy, was at that time in a very embryonic stage. Therefore, Marx could not but eventually *represent* the qualitatively different forms of the class struggle in terms of the *quantitative* difference of their respective scope. That is why, when read as a self-contained account, it could be read in a simplistic and mechanistic fashion, as involving a linear and continuous expansion of working class organisation until reaching its truly revolutionary form. Or, alternatively, as a 'contradictory learning process', with steps forward and setbacks, but always potentially self-developing into revolutionary subjectivity. However, when read from the vantage point of Marx's more developed dialectical account in *Capital*, a different picture emerges. On the one hand, it is clear that Marx was (becoming) aware of the need to grasp the specific qualitative determination immanent in each of the forms of the class struggle in order to discover their necessity. On the other hand, Marx's insufficient development of the critique of political economy allowed him to offer just a glimpse of the concrete determinations involved in those social forms. The result of this is that when, however deficiently, those determinations do appear in Marx's analysis (for instance, regarding the relation between 'associations' and the movement of the wage), they give the impression of being just 'objective conditions' for proletarian action. In turn, those conditions appear as 'moulding', 'limiting' or 'constraining' the deployment of the otherwise self-determining potentiality of the 'subjective factor'. In a nutshell, when externally grasped, the social determinations of working class consciousness and action become reduced to a 'context' in which the latter freely develops (maybe as a 'response' to the latter).<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> In fact, it could be argued that the whole history of Marxism revolves around the attempt to solve this

We would like to argue that in both their merits and shortcomings, these texts embody a wider significance beyond the concrete questions they address and the specific (and limited) answers they give. For, when seen from the perspective of the direction that Marx's subsequent scientific development took, we can see those texts as embodying a programmatic significance regarding the specific form of dialectical cognition in its immediate condition of conscious organisation of human transformative action. The starting point of Marx's investigation, the very form in which he attempted to address the questions to be answered and the limitations he encountered; all this, we would like to argue, reveals *the general form of motion of scientific knowledge determined as practical criticism*. This we think, is the lesson that Marx drew from his polemic against Proudhon and, a little bit later, from the defeat of the 1848 revolutions.

It is our claim that, aware of all this, it became clear for Marx that only through the positive reproduction in thought of the determinations of capital and its form of movement could the working class develop its revolutionary consciousness. Science, as Alfred Schmidt puts it, becomes determined as the 'conscious product of historical movement' (Schmidt 1983: 29). Moving forward in its production and giving it a socially reproducible form – i.e. a book – thereby turned out to be a most urgent

---

(false) antinomy between the forms of objectivity and subjectivity of the capital relation. This illusion arises because, as we have seen, when the inner connections between social forms is broken by logical representation, abstract and concrete forms appear side by side as self-subsistent entities, which, at most, interpenetrate. And this applies to the relation between the objective and the subjective forms of the alienated social being as well. For excellent historical accounts of this problematic and thought-provoking reflections, see Aufheben Collective (1993; 1994; 1995), Marramao (1975/6; 1982) and Jacoby (1971; 1975).



political task. In a letter to Meyer from 1867 in which he apologises for the tardiness of his reply, Marx speaks in this way about his activities of the previous years,

Why then did I not answer you? Because I was the whole time at death's door. I thus had to make use of every moment when I was capable of work to complete my book [*Capital*] to which I have sacrificed my health, happiness, and family. I hope this explanation suffices. I laugh at the so-called 'practical' men and their wisdom. If one wanted to be an ox, one could, of course, turn one's back on the sufferings of humanity and look after one's own hide. But I should really have thought myself *unpractical* if I had pegged out without finally completing my book, at least in manuscript (Marx 1987b: 366).

That book, *Capital*, turned out to be Marx's most developed attempt to concretise the general form of motion of dialectical cognition determined as revolutionary science and outlined in this first part of the thesis through the discussion of Marx's early works. In the second part, we shall attempt to demonstrate this through a critical reconstruction of Marx's mature critique of political economy. The latter, we shall argue, is but the scientific development of the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat becoming aware of its own social determinations in their unity and, therefore, of the historical task which, by virtue of them, it will be compelled to do: the conscious production of communism as the most developed form of the critique of capital. To this we now turn.

## **Part II**

# **Dialectical Knowledge in Motion: Revolutionary Subjectivity in Marx's Mature Critique of Political Economy**



## Chapter 4. The commodity-form and the dialectical method

### Introduction

In the Preface to the First Edition of *Capital* Marx makes evident that he was very well aware of the complexity entailed by the first steps in the critique of political economy. Thus he states:

Beginnings are always difficult in all science. The understanding of the first chapter, especially the section that contains the analysis of commodities, will therefore present the greatest difficulty (Marx 1976a: 89).

Indeed, the endless debates over the real meaning and implications of Marx's analysis of the commodity-form among those who claim to be his disciples seem to suggest that, if anything, Marx's warning actually fell short of the real difficulties at stake. On the other hand, whether it is explicitly acknowledged or not, it is clear that those diverse readings of Marx's critique of political economy entail different political implications to be drawn from it (Dimoulis and Milios 2004). In fact, it could be argued - and, hopefully, this chapter and the ones that follow will substantiate this claim - that the analysis of those 'minutiae' which the discussion of the determinations of the commodity-form 'appear to turn upon' (Marx 1976a: 90), are of paramount importance for what should be the only immediate aim of any dialectical investigation of capitalist social forms, namely, the conscious organisation of the revolutionary

action of the proletariat. This is shown not only in Marx's insistence on the impossibility of correctly grasping the determinations of those more abstract social forms from the bourgeois standpoint of political economy (Marx 1976a: 174), but also in the central role they played in his critique of the ideological representations of them coming from the working class movement itself, e.g. Proudhonian socialism.<sup>36</sup>

It is our view that this diversity in the way Marx's followers have read the ideal reproduction of the determinations of the commodity-form contained in *Capital* is closely connected to the varied methodological perspectives from which those authors have attempted to grasp the former. In other words, those different interpretations of the actual *content* of the first section of *Capital* express different understandings of the very *form* of scientific knowledge unfolded in that book. Seen the other way round, and this is the fundamental issue to be discussed in this chapter, we would like to argue that only on the basis of a sound comprehension of the dialectical method can the implications of Marx's analysis of the commodity-form be uncovered in all their plenitude. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to see how Marx's dialectical method as broadly reconstructed in the first part of the thesis sheds light on crucial aspects of the determinations of the commodity-form, which are rarely addressed - or simply overlooked - by most contemporary commentators on his mature works. This will involve not only a methodologically-minded textual reconstruction of Marx's argument in the first chapters of *Capital*, but also a further elaboration, on the basis of that very same method, of determinations which necessarily follow from his own

---

<sup>36</sup> See Clarke (1994) and Shortall (1994) for good reconstructions of Marx's critique of Proudhonian socialism based on the latter's misunderstanding of the nature of the commodity and money-forms.



argument but which, we think, Marx himself did not explicitly (or sufficiently) develop there.

In particular, we shall focus our discussion on two main aspects. First, we shall critically reconstruct Marx's argument about the determinations of the value-form of the product of labour in the first chapter of *Capital*. Through this reconstruction, we will show that many of the confusions and misunderstandings among his followers and critics alike spring from an inadequate grasp of the dialectical structure of Marx's exposition. In the second place, we will discuss the dialectical investigation of the commodity-form as the basis for a scientific comprehension of both the most general forms of *objectivity* and *subjectivity* of the capitalist form of human productive practice. This we shall do mainly through a discussion of Marx's presentation of the fetishism of commodities. Finally, we shall attempt to draw the implications of all this for the notion of dialectical knowledge as practical criticism, that is, as the conscious organisation of the revolutionary action of the working class.

## The dialectical method and the structure of Marx's exposition of the determinations of the commodity

### *Inquiry and Presentation, Analysis and Synthesis: on some controversies over the initial passages of Marx's argument in Capital*

In *Capital* Marx puts into motion the discoveries which allowed him to overcome the limitations of his early account of alienated labour and its supersession. In contradistinction with the *Paris Manuscripts*, and as he clearly states in the *Marginal Notes on Adolf Wagner*, he takes as a point of departure neither the concepts of political economy nor any concept whatsoever (Marx 1975b: 198), in order thereby to discover alienated labour as their presupposition. As the title of his most important work denotes, the subject whose determinations the dialectical investigation proceeds to discover and present is *capital*, which, as the alienated subject of social life becomes 'the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society' and must therefore 'form the starting-point as well as the finishing-point' of the ideal reproduction of the concrete (Marx 1993: 107). In this sense, Marx's exposition in *Capital* does not advance towards the discovery of alienation but starts from what the analytic stage of the dialectical inquiry revealed as its most abstract and general form (Meikle 1985: 71-2). He starts with the immediate observation of the simplest *concretum* in which the alienation of labour is expressed in order to develop the real determinations specific to this social form (Marx 1975b: 198). As has now been widely acknowledged, this starting point is not an ideal-typical – or worse, historically existent – simple commodity-producing society, as in the orthodoxy derived from



Engels (1980) and popularised by authors such as Sweezy (1968) and Meek (1973).<sup>37</sup>

In Marx's own words, he starts with the commodity as the 'economic cell-form of bourgeois society' (Marx 1976a: 90):

We begin with the commodity, with this specific social form of the product – for it is the foundation and premise of capitalist production. We take the individual product in our hand and analyse the formal determinants that it contains as a commodity and which stamp it as a commodity (Marx 1976d: 1059).

However, Marx's presentation does not directly start with the essential determinations of the commodity-form but starts from the immediate observation of an individual

---

<sup>37</sup> For a critique of the Engelsian orthodoxy on this question see Arthur (1996; 1997; 1998a), Robles Báez (2000), Reichelt (1995) and Weeks (1981).

commodity in its outward appearance.<sup>38</sup> In a presentation which will prove full of 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' (Marx 1976a: 163), Marx shows that what determines the commodity as a form of social wealth is not only that, as any product of labour, it possesses a use-value, but that the latter acts as the material bearer of a second attribute, namely: exchange-value. The further analysis of the commodity reveals that exchange-value is actually the form of expression of a content distinguishable from it - the value-form, or the attribute of general exchangeability of the commodity – the substance of which resides in the abstract labour congealed in it, and whose magnitude is consequently determined by the socially necessary abstract labour-time required for its production.

As we can see, instead of immediately following the *synthetic* realisation of the determinations of the commodity, Marx firstly and very briefly *presents*, in a 'stylised'

---

<sup>38</sup> Properly speaking, there is a previous step in Marx's presentation. He first starts with the form in which social wealth appears in capitalist society, namely, an 'immense collection of commodities' (Marx 1976a: 125), the individual commodity being its elementary form. The unfolding of the determinations behind this appearance is not completed until Volume 2, where the unity of the movement of social capital itself, in the form of the circuit of commodity-capital, is revealed as positing social wealth in the form of an immense collection of commodities (Marx 1978: 174-177). The secondary literature on Volume 2 is remarkably limited compared with what has been written on Volumes 1 and 3. Certainly, there has been a lot of discussion of the final part on the schemes of reproduction, misguidedly revolving around the notion of a mechanical impossibility of capitalist reproduction as constituting the limit to capital. See Rosdolsky (1986) for a survey of the early classical debates on that question. But the first part of Volume 2 has been generally neglected. Some of the few works available that deal in some detail with aspects of the former include: Fine (1975), Shortall (1994), Fine and Saad-Filho (2003), Arthur and Reuten (1998). On the circuit of capital, see especially the contribution by Arthur (1998b) in the latter book.



form, the *analytic* movement from the concrete to the abstract through which those inner or essential determinations were discovered in the process of *inquiry*.

The italics in the previous sentence have not been randomly chosen.<sup>39</sup> They are meant to highlight the crucial distinction between the different moments of Marx's dialectical investigation, the confusion over which, we think, lies at the basis of widespread critiques of Marx's line of argument about the determinations of the commodity-form; not only by its well-known bourgeois critics such as Boehm-Bawerk (1975), but also among some of his disciples.<sup>40</sup> In brief, the general thrust of those objections goes, Marx did not provide in *Capital* an adequate 'logical proof' that commodities have a 'something' in common and that that 'something' is congealed abstract labour.<sup>41</sup>

The first point to note concerns the difference between the process of inquiry and that of presentation. Put simply, Marx is not attempting 'logically' to *prove* anything (whether dialectically or otherwise), be it the 'concept' of value or that of abstract labour or their relation. The identification of the different forms taken by the subject whose movement the process of dialectical cognition attempts to reproduce in thought - i.e. the analytical separation between forms according to their relative degree of

---

<sup>39</sup> These different aspects of the materialist dialectical investigation have been insightfully explored by Schmidt (1983).

<sup>40</sup> Thus both Reuten (1993: 107) and Arthur (1993: 76) agree that Boehm-Bawerk's objections to Marx's line of reasoning about abstract labour as the substance of value are justified; not because Marx is wrong in seeing abstract labour as the substance of value, but because his grounding of that point is defective from a 'systematic-dialectical' perspective.

<sup>41</sup> A good and concise account of the essence of this critique can be found in Kay (1979: 48-58)

concreteness – and the 'tracking down of their inner connection' - the synthetic discovery of the immanent real necessity linking those different forms – do not belong to the dialectical *presentation* but to the process of *inquiry*. The actual discovery of the real relations between social forms is not something we shall find in Marx's *Capital*, i.e. in the definitive exposition of the results of the dialectical inquiry. If anything, those discoveries might appear in the different manuscripts and reading notes that led to the writing of *Capital*. The dialectical exposition only *shows* those discoveries by ideally unfolding the real movement of the different social forms. Yet Marx warns his readers in the Postface to the Second Edition, if that presentation is successful in ideally reproducing the real movement 'it may appear as if we have before us an *a priori* construction' (Marx 1976a: 102). In other words, that what is at stake is a purely deductive process of 'logical proof'.<sup>42</sup> And a faulty one for that matter, Boehm-Bawerk would claim, since, for instance, Marx did not take into consideration common properties other than being products of labour - e.g. utility, scarcity, and so on - as possible determinants of exchange-value (Boehm-Bawerk 1975: 74-5). Leaving aside Boehm-Bawerk's and other critics' complete confusion about the actual object of Marx's presentation in chapter 1 - i.e. the commodity, and not the causal determination of exchange ratios (Kliman 2000: 104) – it is to be noted that Marx's exclusion of other possibilities derives from the fact that, inasmuch as the dialectical researcher presenting his/her results already knows where the movement is heading, the exposition acquires a fluidity that does not reflect the laboriousness involved in the two stages of the inquiry - analysis and synthesis - and thereby

---

<sup>42</sup> As Sayer notes (1979: 94-5), Althusser (Althusser and Balibar 1968) and his British followers (Hindess and Hirst 1975; 1977), fell prey to this appearance.



excludes all false starts and paths that he/she may have encountered in his/her research, especially when producing an original process of cognition.

The second aspect of Marx's presentation which is generally overlooked by many critics concerns the distinction between the other pair of terms italicised above, namely: the analytic and the synthetic stages. For the point here is that the exposition of the *explanation* proper of the necessity underlying the relations between different social forms - what would amount to a 'logical proof' in the inverted language of representational thought - is not to be found in the dialectical *analysis*, but in the *synthetic* movement of the presentation.<sup>43</sup> Since it is only in the latter that the unfolding of the real movement of determination - hence the explanation - actually takes place, the presentation of those findings should take, in principle, a fully synthetic form. However, this is not the way Marx structured his dialectical exposition

---

<sup>43</sup> Thus it is the dialectical synthesis that reveals the 'why' of real relations. The analytic stage only separates a concrete form from the abstract form whose realised necessity it carries within itself in the form of its own immanent potentiality. In this sense, the analytic stage is not about the *why* but about the *what*. Evidently, since the separation of real forms according to their relative degree of abstractness/concreteness ideally expresses the objective necessity (the real relations) residing in the object and are not the product of the subjective caprice or imagination of the scientist, the mere reference to the 'what' carries implicitly some hint of the 'why'. Thus, if the dialectical analysis reveals that the value-form is the concrete form in which the objectification of the abstract character of private labour affirms itself as an abstract form, the separation between the two already says something about the real relation involved. But this something is no more than, as it were, a 'pointing out', an observation. The actual ideal reproduction of that inner connection - the explanation - takes place in the synthetic movement. In his *Science of Logic*, Hegel refers to this distinction between the role of analysis and synthesis as the difference between the *apprehension* of what is and its *comprehension* (Hegel 1999: 793-4).

in Volume 1 of *Capital* (the only one he edited for publication himself); this exposition tends to include, in a stylised form, brief presentations of the analytic process.<sup>44</sup> Since this peculiar structure of Marx's presentation of the determinations of the commodity-form actually recurs throughout most of Volume 1 of *Capital* and its misunderstanding has caused so many controversies among critics and followers alike, it might be worth shortly describing its general form.

In a nutshell, this structure of the dialectical presentation consists in taking the immediate concrete appearance of the determinate social form at stake in order to, after a brief analytic movement, uncover its inner determination. The exposition then proceeds by synthetically unfolding the realisation of that (more abstract) determination. This stage goes on until the specific potentiality defining the determination of the social form under scrutiny, and whose realisation the exposition is ideally reproducing, negates itself as immediately carried by that abstract social

---

<sup>44</sup> On the role and the pros and cons of this analytic moment in the peculiar structure of the dialectical exposition in Volume 1 of *Capital*, organised around presentational 'nodes', see Iñigo Carrera (1992). Regarding Chapter 1 in particular, this structure has been recognised by Banaji (1979) and Elson (1979a). Murray (1988: 148-9) rightly sees the structure of Chapter 1 as comprising a 'double movement' of form to content and then from content to form. However, presumably reducing the dialectical movement to the synthetic stage, he sees nothing particularly dialectical in the first movement. In reality, the general point about the two-fold movement of analysis and synthesis in Marx's exposition had already been made by Rubin in his seminal work on the theory of value (Rubin 1972: 113). However, as we shall discuss below, his understanding of the way they structure the exposition is, we think, incorrect. Furthermore, although Rubin does distinguish between the analytic and the synthetic (genetic, as he calls it) stages of the presentation, he seems to restrict the dialectical method to the latter (Rubin 1978: 110). In this way, the specific form of the dialectical analysis vis-à-vis the analysis of representational scientific thought is overlooked.



form to become affirmed as immediately pertaining to the more concrete form into which it has metamorphosed. This signals that the first presentational node has been exhausted. A new one thereby begins, but now with the more concrete form whose genesis has been traced in the former as the subject of the movement to be ideally reproduced. However, the new node does not directly start with the inner determinations of this more concrete social form but, again, with its immediate manifestation. A brief analytic movement therefore precedes the former.<sup>45</sup>

With this in mind, it is easy to understand the main reason why the criticisms levelled at Marx about his inadequate explanation of abstract labour as the substance of value in the first pages of *Capital* are not simply based on a misunderstanding about the particularities of his argument, but are completely off the mark. To put it simply, those critiques search for an explanation in the wrong place, that is, in the pages where Marx is just presenting the analytic separation of real forms, which comprise the first two sections of Chapter 1. Marx's alleged explanation of why abstract labour is the substance of value in those pages sounds unconvincing simply because it is not there. As we shall briefly see, the unfolding of this particular 'why' only occurs in section three, which discusses exchange-value as the form of manifestation of value. Before engaging in that aspect of Marx's presentation of the determinations of the commodity-form, let us first dwell deeper on the *specifically dialectical* form of the analytical moment that precedes it.

---

<sup>45</sup> At this juncture it is important to point out that, in the dialectical *inquiry*, analysis and synthesis overlap in the concrete intellectual labour of the scientist. Thus the actual activity of inquiry of the dialectical researcher involves a constant passage from phases of analysis to phases of synthesis and therefore do not immediately appear as distinct aspects of the process of cognition. However, they do constitute two real determinations of the dialectical method and therefore it is crucial to bear their difference in mind. And it is this real difference which appears 'in its purity' in the dialectical exposition, when the author decides to reproduce the analytical stage (whether in whole or in part) in the presentation.

### *The phase of analysis*

In contrast with the claims of those critics referred to above, we think that in the opening pages of chapter 1 Marx is not searching for a common property in commodities. Rather, he is searching for (i.e. not yet unfolding) the specific determination defining the potentiality of the commodity as a historical form of social wealth.<sup>46</sup> This potentiality Marx initially 'discovers' by looking at the use-value of the

---

<sup>46</sup> The difference between these two forms of grasping Marx's argument in the first pages of *Capital* expresses the difference between the dialectical form of the analysis and that of representational thinking. Many authors have highlighted the distinction between the abstractions of dialectics and those of representational thought as one between 'real abstractions vs. mental generalisation' (Saad-Filho 2002) or 'empiricist abstractions vs. determinate abstractions' (Gunn 1992). 'Empiricist abstractions' have also been called 'formal abstractions' (Clarke 1991a) or 'general abstractions' (Murray 1988). However, as Iñigo Carrera points out (2003: 250), what most authors have overlooked is that the difference in the respective kinds of abstraction emerges as a result of the very *form* of the process of cognition on the basis of which those abstractions are identified. This difference in form not only applies to the synthetic or genetic phase – as is usually assumed – but *crucially pertains to the process of analysis as well*. Representational thought analyses a concrete form by separating what repeats itself from what does not in order to arrive at a certain characteristic which makes possible the mental construction of a definition of that concrete form as that which has this or that attribute. Conversely, dialectical thought analyses a concrete form by, first of all, facing it as embodying a qualitative potentiality for transformation. Secondly, by grasping that qualitative potentiality as the concrete form in which a more abstract form realises its own qualitative potentiality, i.e. its real necessity. Thus the dialectical ideal appropriation of the universe of different real forms does not proceed through an



individual commodity, which in capitalist societies acts as bearer of that second, *historically-specific* attribute of the products of labour, namely, *exchange-value*. Two things follow from this. First, that inasmuch as it is materially borne by the use-value of the commodity, this attribute is *intrinsic* to the commodity itself. Secondly, as argued above, that Marx is not *trying to prove logically the existence of a common property* but *the commodity itself*, in its immediacy, shows that it *has* that 'common property' immanent in it.

Here a problem might arise because Marx does not explicitly say what that second attribute of the commodity consists in. He just names it (exchange-value) and then directly proceeds to its analysis. We think that the reason for this is that the meaning of that attribute was self-evident in the name itself in light of its everyday usage at that time. The fact that commodities have 'exchange-value' simply means that they have the *power of exchangeability*, that is, *the aptitude to be transformed into a different use-value without the mediation of any material transformation in its bodily existence*. What immediately follows in Marx's exposition is, then, the *dialectical analysis* of this social power of exchangeability of commodities. That is, Marx proceeds to answer what is the source of this specific potentiality intrinsic to the

---

identification of the distinctiveness of forms on the basis of the degree of repetition of certain attributes. Rather, it analytically separates the different forms by discovering as immanent in a particular concrete form the realised necessity of another real form, which is abstract with respect to the first one, but concrete with respect to another form of which it is the realised necessity. Hence, whilst representational analysis grasps the general determination of real forms as immediate affirmations - hence self-subsistent entities - the distinctive mark of the process of analysis in dialectical research is to grasp, *in the same analytic movement*, both the real form under scrutiny and the more abstract one of which the former is the developed mode of existence.

commodity, i.e. what is the abstract form appearing in the concrete form of the power of exchangeability.

As happens with every real form, the first thing he encounters when facing the exchangeability of the commodity is its *immediate manifestation* - the quantitative relation 'in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another' (Marx 1976a: 126). Thus, the first step in the analysis of exchangeability is the separation of the *content and form* of that specific attribute of the commodity, this being the only way in which we can penetrate through the concrete form in which an abstract form presents itself. Again, this is the immediate object of Marx's exposition in the passages that follow, and not the search for a 'common something' or 'third thing', the existence of which the distinction between form and content presupposes. This separation between form and content reveals that the different *particular* exchange relations that a commodity establishes with other commodities are actually expressions of something else that inheres in commodities and which gives them the identical *qualitative* potentiality of *general exchangeability* in a certain *magnitude*. Once form and content of the attribute of general exchangeability are distinguished, Marx continues with the analysis of the latter, which consists in separating that form of general exchangeability from the abstract form whose necessity it carries within itself as its 'other'. The particular form that this analysis takes is, again, not the search for a common element, but the search for the determinate action which posits that specific attribute existing in commodities. That action, Marx states, is a human action in one of its facets, namely: productive labour in its general character or abstract



labour. Commodities have this attribute of general exchangeability as products of the abstract character of the labour objectified in them.<sup>47</sup>

And here there is a tricky aspect in Marx's presentation, which might have contributed to much of the confusion. Because, although at that stage of the argument he has already shown that the common 'something' is the form of general exchangeability, he does not actually *name* it until separating, in turn, that form from its content or substance.

All these things now tell us is that human labour-power has been expended to produce them, human labour is accumulated in them. As crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values - commodity values [*Warenwerte*].

We have seen that when commodities are exchanged, their exchange-value manifests itself as something totally independent of their use-value. But if we abstract from their use-value, there remains their value, as it has just been defined. The common factor in the exchange relation, or in the exchange-value of the commodity, is therefore its value (Marx 1976a: 128).

---

<sup>47</sup> Admittedly, Marx's transition to abstract labour might appear as abrupt, too unproblematic. But here it is important to bear in mind what we indicated above about the dialectical exposition having a fluidity which does not reflect the complexity of the real activity of analysis in the process of inquiry. Hence when considering the action that posits the form of general exchangeability of commodities, the only actions other than labour he contemplates (and discards) are purely natural actions. In other words, he does not consider other kinds of human action.

That intrinsic attribute of general exchangeability which is manifested in exchange-value, and which is posited by the abstract character of labour, is called by Marx *value*. Now, in opposition to the claims of a great deal of contemporary literature on Marx's theory of the value-form, we think that the (analytic) search for the specific determinations of the commodity - Marx's stated aim in Chapter 1 according to the quote above - is evidently not achieved with the discovery of abstract labour as the substance of value.<sup>48</sup> Quite to the contrary, that very specificity seemed to have slipped through Marx's fingers. In effect, although he found the specific attribute of the commodity in its value, when he moved to account for its substance he ended up with something which bears no specifically-capitalist character: 'merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour, i.e. of human labour power expended

---

<sup>48</sup> As a reaction to the ahistorical, Ricardian reading of Marx's account of the value-form, the 'new consensus' tends to see abstract labour as a purely historical, specific social form (Mohun and Himmelweit 1978; Eldred and Haldon 1981; de Vroey 1982; Reuten 1993; De Angelis 1995; Postone 1996; Saad-Filho 1997; Bellofiore and Finelli 1998; Kay 1999; Arthur 2001b). For a critique of this literature, see Kicillof and Starosta (2004). We do not agree with this. As we argue below, abstract labour is a generic material form, a 'productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc.' (Marx 1976a: 134). What is specific to capitalist society is the role it plays by being determined as the substance of the most abstract form of objectified social mediation, namely: value. In a recent article, Murray (2000) comes very close to recognising this but, we think, eventually muddles the question by doubling the contradictory existence of abstract labour into *two* different categories: 'physiological' abstract labour and 'practically-abstract' labour. See also Reuten's reply to Murray (2000) and the latter's rejoinder (Murray 2002). Whilst still seeing abstract labour as capital-specific, Robles Báez offers probably one of the best treatments of the *movement of the contradiction* between the generic, physiological materiality of abstract labour and its historically-specific *social* determination as the substance of value deriving from the private character of labour in capitalism (Robles Báez 2004).



without regard to the form of its expenditure' (Marx 1976a: 128). But it is evident that in any form of society human beings objectified their subjective labour-power and that that process of objectification entailed both a concrete or particular character and an abstract or general one. Thus far, then, this stage of the analytic process does *not* show *why* this generic materiality takes the objectified social form of value. It does not even tell us *what* is the historical form of social labour which is determined as value-producing. It *only* tells us *what* is the *material* determination of that which in capitalist society is *socially* represented in the form of value. This is the reason why Marx still carries on with the analytic search of the '*formal determinants* that it contains as a commodity and which stamp it as a commodity'. As any attentive reader could tell, the analytic process continues and it is only in the section on the dual character of labour that Marx finally finds the historically-specific form of social labour that produces commodities and, hence, value. The commodity, Marx concludes, is the objectification 'of mutually independent acts of labour, performed in isolation' (Marx 1976a: 131). In other words, it is the 'labour of private individuals who work independently of each other' (Marx 1976a: 165), or *private labour*, which constitutes the specifically capitalist form of labour. The analytic process completes the search for the specific determinations of the value-form by revealing that the attribute of general exchangeability of the commodity springs from the abstract or general character of *privately performed* labour materialised in it. The commodity, then, becomes known in its essential determination as the *materialised general social relation of private and independent producers*.

### *The synthetic phase*

It is only now that the synthetic stage of the presentation begins. This consists in ideally following the realisation of the discovered potentiality immanent in the commodity. From then on, the commodity ceases to be grasped in its exteriority as an 'inert' social form - as a sheer external object - and the exposition starts to follow its self-movement as the subject of the development of those determinations - previously discovered through analysis - into ever more concrete forms. This is subtly indicated by Marx at the end of his discussion of the qualitative determinations of the relative form of value.

We see, then, that everything our analysis of the value of commodities previously told us is repeated by the linen itself, as soon as it enters into association with another commodity, the coat. Only it reveals its thoughts in a language with which it alone is familiar, the language of commodities. In order to tell us that labour creates its own value in its abstract quality of being human labour, it says that the coat, in so far as it counts as its equal, i.e. is value, consists of the same labour as it does itself. In order to inform us that its sublime objectivity as value differs from its stiff and starchy existence as a body, it says that value has the appearance of a coat, and consequently that in so far as the linen itself is an object of value [*Wertding*], it and the coat are as like as two peas (Marx 1976a: 143-4).

The unfolding of this movement spoken 'in the language of commodities' is precisely what the subsequent synthetic stage of the presentation consists in. Value being a



purely social power of the commodity, it cannot be immediately expressed in its sensuous corporeal materiality. As the capacity of the commodity to be exchanged for other different commodities, value can only be manifested in the social relation of exchange between commodities. Therefore, the value of a commodity necessarily expresses itself only in the use-value of the commodity that is exchanged for the commodity in question as its equivalent. In this way, value takes the concrete shape of exchange-value as its necessary form of appearance. In its most developed form, value acquires independent existence as money and the expression of value in the particular commodity acting as money becomes determined as price. The opposition inherent in the commodity is thus externalised through the doubling of the commodity-form into ordinary commodities and money. The power of direct exchangeability of commodities negates itself as such to become affirmed as a social power monopolised by the money-form.

It is in the course of the synthetic movement of this formal development, when seen from the point of view of its *qualitative content*, that the answer to the 'why' questions which the analytic stage was impotent to provide is given. In other words, it is the development of the expression of value that unfolds the explanation as to why the objectification of the abstract character of privately performed labour takes the social form of value or, to put it differently, why private labour is value-producing. Furthermore, we shall see that it is this ideal reproduction of the necessity of the value-form that eventually puts us before the immediate object of the exposition of the section on the fetishism of commodities - namely, the determinations of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer - as its necessary concrete form.

In a nutshell, the issue comes down to the fact that it is only the expression of value that progressively reveals to us the problem that the commodity-form of the product of labour is meant to solve. We are referring to the mediation in the establishment of the unity of social labour when performed in a private and independent manner.<sup>49</sup> And since this unity becomes condensed in the money-form, it is the unfolding of its determinations, synthesised in the peculiarities of the equivalent-form and derived from its general determination as the form of immediate exchangeability, that provides the answer to the question as to why private labour must produce value.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> In reality, the problem itself is posed by Marx's exposition in the previous section of the double character of labour, while still at the analytic stage of the presentation. Certainly, in our reconstruction above we omitted a step in his argument, which is that generalised commodity production presupposes the existence of an extended social division of labour and that the latter, as the 'totality of varying deployments of useful labour' is an 'eternal necessity of nature for the sake of mediating the material interchange between man and nature (i.e. human life)' (Marx 1976f: 12). It is at that juncture that the analysis of the individual commodity confronts us, for the first time, with the question of the unity of social labour. But, as noted above, this still leaves unanswered the question about why the value-form must mediate this process of metabolism when taking the form of private labour.

<sup>50</sup> In the Second Edition of *Capital* and the 'Value-form' appendix to the First Edition, Marx develops all the peculiarities of the equivalent-form as part of his discussion of the *simple* form of value. Contrariwise, in the First Edition the second and third peculiarities are developed in the context of the 'reversed' form of the expanded form of value, an intermediate step which Marx did not include in the Second Edition, where he directly jumped from the expanded form of value to the general form. We think that, for our purposes here, the presentation of the First Edition is clearer. In effect, as Marx himself notes (Marx 1976f: 26), the problem at stake (the establishment of the unity of social labour) becomes actually revealed to be solved when the expression of value acquires its plenitude as the form of general exchangeability by relating through the value-form the universe of all existing commodities. This only occurs with the general form of value (although a defective - because not unified - manifestation is already found in the expanded form). That is why we shall follow the presentation of



As the other side of its two-step analytic discovery, the synthetic ideal reproduction of the determinations of the value-form comprises two aspects, each one respectively corresponding to the second and third peculiarities of the equivalent form. The first one, whereby the concrete labour that produces the particular commodity acting as general equivalent becomes the form of manifestation of the general character of human labour, shows, precisely, why that material expenditure of labour-power has to act as the social form of labour, i.e. why it is that *abstract* labour is the substance of value. The second one, whereby the private labour that produces the equivalent

---

the First Edition. On the other hand, there might be a strong reason why Marx decided to move the peculiarities of the equivalent form to the simple expression of value. Basically, the point is that for the presentation of the unfolding of the specific content of the *qualitative* determination involved in the expression of value its simple form suffices. That is why Marx states that ‘the whole mystery of the form of value lies hidden in this simple form’ (Marx 1976a: 139). The *further* formal unfolding of the more developed expressions of value only entails *quantitative* differences within that very same *qualitative determination*. Certainly, that purely *formal-logical* construction *helps* the comprehension of the qualitative determination entailed in the form of value by making explicit aspects of the former which are not *immediately visible* in the simple form. This it does inasmuch as it shows the unfolding of the quantitative multiplicity and generality of the expression of value in their plenitude (Robles Báez 1997). But no novel *quality* is unfolded [in passing, let us note that in the *Logic* Hegel develops those determinations of the ‘one and the many’ still within the section on quality. However, as Gaete (1995: 48-9) points out, they already constitute the transition to the determinations of quantity and are there for the sake of the smoothness of the passage from qualitative being to quantity]. Incidentally, this illustrates what is the role of *formal logic* within dialectical knowledge, namely: the *representation* of the determinations of quantity, that is, of ‘difference determined as indifference’ (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 237). Or, in the words of Hegel, ‘a being that is indifferent with regard to determinacy’ (Hegel 1991: 157).

commodity becomes the immediate incarnation of directly social labour, in turn makes it evident why private labour must produce value at all.

In effect, through the general expression of value, all commodities relate to each other as possessing an identical social essence as exchangeable things in the same magnitude. In other words, albeit in a mediated form that reflects their social form of value as the immediate attribute of the general equivalent, their social relation of general exchangeability achieves its unity. But, since they are only values as expressions of the same common social substance, i.e. abstract labour, the unity of the expression of value puts us before the unity of *undifferentiated* human labour. In determining the concrete labour that produced the equivalent as the immediate mode of appearance of abstract human labour, now the social relation between commodities itself makes plain that the different concrete labours that produced them are but different ways in which the total labour-power of society has been expended. Those varied useful labours now show themselves to be what they actually are: differentiations of the expenditure of human labour-power or determinate modes in which the human body has been productively exerted. In this ‘roundabout way’, as Marx puts it, the development of exchange-value confronts us with the generic problem that any society must confront, namely, *the social regulation of the differentiation of human labour*, which ‘is capable of receiving each and every determination (...) but is undetermined just in and for itself’ (Marx 1976f: 20), and which is necessary for the reproduction of human life. The exposition of the dialectical analysis of the commodity had already discovered that a commodity-producing society presupposed an extended division of labour. Now we can see that the materialised social relation itself – the value-form - *affirms itself as the mediator*



in the articulation of that division of labour, i.e. in establishing the relation between different labours as organic specifications of human labour in general.

As *values* the commodities *are* expressions of the *same unity*, of abstract human labour. In the form of *exchange value* they *appear* to one another *as values and relate* themselves to one another *as values*. They thereby relate themselves at the same time to abstract labour as their *common social substance*. Their *social relationship* consists exclusively in counting with respect to one another as expressions of this social substance of theirs which differs only quantitatively, but which is qualitatively equal and hence replaceable and interchangeable with one another (...) It is only the kind of thing that can turn mere objects of use into *commodities* and hence into a *social rapport*. But this is just what *value* is. The *form* in which the commodities *count* to one another as values – as coagulations of human labour – is consequently their *social form* (Marx 1976f: 28-9).

The necessity of abstract labour as the substance of value thus becomes finally unfolded. Abstract labour is the substance of value not because a logical argument says that it is the common property of commodities we were searching for in the name of sound principles of logic. Abstract labour becomes determined as the substance of value because *in reality* the latter is the objectified social form that mediates the organisation of that purely material expenditure of human body into its different concrete forms across society. The latter being what the value-form mediates, what else could be represented in that objectified form? On the other hand, it is self-evident that abstract labour does not cease to be a generic material form because of this

determination as the substance of value. Hence, as stated above, the determination of labour as abstract labour is not the reason behind its existence as value-producing. What is specific to capitalist society is that this purely material form negates itself as simply such to become affirmed as the producer of the (objectified) general social relation (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 301). Once objectified, the generic *materiality* of the abstract character of labour plays a particular social role in the process of social metabolism by being represented as the *social objectivity of value*.

The commodities' social form is their relationship to one another as *equal labour*; hence - since the equality of *totto coelo* [utterly] different labours can only consist in an *abstraction from their inequality* - their relationship to one another as *human labour* in general: expenditures of human labour power, which is what all human labours - whatever their content or mode of operation - actually *are*. In each social form of labour, the labours of different individuals are related to one another as human labours too, but in this case this *relating itself* counts as the *specifically social form* of the labours (Marx 1976f: 32)

To recapitulate, thus far we have discussed how the formal development of exchange-value, and in particular the unfolding of the determinations of the second peculiarity of the equivalent-form, contains the account of the reason why *abstract labour* is the substance of value. What still remains to be answered is why abstract labour *is the substance of value*. In other words, we have to see why human productive activity becomes determined in capitalist society as value-producing, the second step in the synthetic movement referred to above.



In the same vein as the third peculiarity of the equivalent immediately follows from the second one, so does the answer to this question follow from the previous one. In effect, as the social incarnation of human labour in general, the concrete labour that produces the equivalent acquires in its immediacy the form of equality with respect to the other concrete useful labours. In this form of immediate identity with every other concrete labour, the labour that materialises in the general equivalent is *immediately social*, whilst the useful labours producing the rest of commodities remain *not-immediately social*. Thus the development of the expression of value in the form of exchange-value puts us before the reason why the organisation of the division of labour must necessarily be mediated in this reified form or, what is the same, why commodity-producing labour is essentially value-producing. Although materially dependent upon one another as part of the 'primordial system of the division of labour', this irreducibly social character of *private labours* is not immediately manifested when they are actually objectified in the direct process of production. Hence, this necessary social articulation of private labours is realised through the mediation of the exchange of the products of private labour as commodities. Only at that moment is it revealed whether the expenditure of the portion of social labour which each producer personifies is socially useful. This is the reason why the social character of the privately-performed individual productive activities is specifically represented as a determinate objective attribute of the products of labour: the form of their general exchangeability or their value-form. The basis of this reified social mediation thus resides in the fact that the unity of social labour is manifested, as Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*, only *post festum*, through the exchange of the products of labour (Marx 1993: 172). Furthermore, the unity of social labour thus becomes

socially represented in the form of the particular private product that the rest of commodities separate as their general equivalent and which eventually ossifies in the money-form. In tracing the genesis of the latter through the ideal reproduction of the expression of value, the synthetic stage of the dialectical exposition thereby positively unfolds the determinations of that which the analytic process could only *point out*. Namely, that the value-form of the product of labour is the materialised social relation of human beings and, therefore, the *social subject* of the *form* of the social process of production of human-life.<sup>51</sup>

It is only at this juncture that Marx introduces the fundamental discussion of the fetish-like character of commodities. The question that immediately arises, and which is hardly addressed in the literature, is why only and precisely then? We think that the answer to this question is inseparable from the issue about the determinate content of the section on commodity fetishism and its place in the overall structure of Marx's exposition in *Capital*. The object of the next section, then, is to proceed to deal with these questions. Again, we shall show that only through a proper grasp of the dialectical method can the full implications and significance of Marx's account of commodity-fetishism be uncovered.

---

<sup>51</sup> We shall see that in becoming capital, the materialised social relation of private and independent individuals is constituted as the social subject of the *form and content* of the process of production of human life.



## The role and place of commodity fetishism in Marx's dialectical exposition in *Capital*

### *The immediate object of exposition of the section on commodity fetishism*

Ever since the publication of works such as Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (1972) or Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1971) the emphasis on Marx's analysis of commodity-fetishism has been a hallmark of critical traditions of Marxism. In effect, according to those traditions, commodity-fetishism is the cornerstone upon which the understanding of Marx's mature works as a *critique* of political economy (as opposed to political economy or economics) depends (Clarke 1991a; Holloway 1992). While there is no doubt that the analysis of the fetishism of commodities plays a fundamental part in Marx's critique of political economy, the question is, once we accept that premise, what are the precise meaning and implications of such a notion for the scientific comprehension of capitalist society as whole; and more concretely, for the proletarian political action through which the movement of capital realises its own annihilation. Here, the mere reference to the centrality of the historicity of bourgeois social forms and their fetishistic character does not suffice to grasp the critical and revolutionary nature of the critique of political economy. As we have been arguing throughout this thesis, the specific form of the dialectical method is fundamental in this respect. And *pace* Rubin (1972: 5), however central to the comprehension of Marx's critique of political economy, the analysis of the fetishism of commodities is not the basis of the determinations of the value-form. On the contrary, we would like to argue that the former is a necessary

development of the latter.<sup>52</sup> This is far from being a minor point and is actually crucial for a proper comprehension of the nature of commodity-fetishism and, hence, for the ideal reproduction of the determinations of the most general concrete forms of objectivity and subjectivity of capitalist society.

In order to clarify the issue, let us go straight to the point and pose the fundamental question which underlies the proper comprehension of the place of the section on commodity-fetishism in the structure of Marx's dialectical presentation, namely: what is, in a nutshell, the immediate object of the exposition in that section? In our view, those pages basically develop the determinations of the alienated consciousness of the commodity-producer. Or, better stated, they unfold the determinations of the alienated consciousness as such which, therefore, becomes *expounded* as an alienated consciousness. This is because, in reality, the whole of Chapter 1 (and, actually, the whole of *Capital*) has as its object the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer. As indicated above, unlike the *Paris Manuscripts*, the exposition in *Capital* does not move towards alienated consciousness but takes it as its point of departure. However, the latter text starts not with the alienated consciousness in and for itself, but with its most general *objective* form in the capitalist mode of production, namely, the commodity. The latter is the immediate subject of those determinations and, hence, of the dialectical presentation.

Conversely, in the section on commodity fetishism Marx discusses the way in which those forms of objectivity, engendered by the human brain itself when social labour

---

<sup>52</sup> See Inigo Carrera (2003: 307-12) for a critique of this inversion by Rubin. De Angelis (De Angelis 1996: 15) makes the same critical point, although from a different approach.



takes the form of private labour, appear to the producers themselves. Their consciousness thereby comes to be the immediate object of the exposition. In this respect, it could be said that this section opens a kind of new presentational (sub)node, which, in turn, constitutes a necessary mediation for the determinations to be unfolded in Chapter 2 on the process of exchange. This in the sense that the section on commodity fetishism focuses on the determinations of the consciousness of the commodity producer analytically separated from the human action it regulates in the process of exchange. In other words, it expounds the determinations of consciousness with regards to its *form*. In Chapter 2, Marx then follows the determinations of that form of consciousness in motion, i.e. in its unity with action as conscious practice in the sphere of circulation.<sup>53</sup>

As corresponds to the nodal structure of Marx's exposition, he starts the section on commodity fetishism with an immediate observation: 'A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing' (Marx 1976a: 163). However, very quickly he develops the analytic movement which brings us to the inner determinations

---

<sup>53</sup> And even at that level, the alienated action that personifies the realisation of the necessity of the commodity to establish an exchange relation is still abstract, part of what Marx calls in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the 'theoretical phase of circulation' of commodities, 'preparatory to real circulation' (Marx 1987a: 303), which can only take place once 'as a result of establishing prices, commodities have acquired the form in which they are able to enter circulation' (Marx 1987a: 323). By this Marx means the ideal reproduction of the determinations of the circulation of commodities which constitute the premises of its actual movement. This 'theoretical circulation' comprises Chapters 1, 2 and the first section of 3 (the functions of measure of value and standard of prices). Only then the actual circulation of commodities is reproduced in thought, revealing the subsequent functions of money not as its preconditions but as its concrete forms.

discovered in the previous section and which constitute the actual starting point of the synthetic stage of the presentation. In effect, Marx points out, although immediately appearing as a trivial thing, the commodity is in reality an entity full of metaphysical subtleties, a sensible/suprasensible being with the fantastic power of being transformed into another use-value without even touching its materiality (Marx 1976a: 163). On the other hand, at this stage of the process of cognition we already know the source of such mysticism; it derives from the commodity-form itself, i.e. from its character as a materialised social relation. This we - the readers of Marx's *Capital* - have discovered through the mediation of the development of our scientific consciousness. But how is this determination seen by the immediate consciousness of the commodity producer? The transition is, then, from the *formal* subject of the value-determinations, i.e. the commodity, to the *material* subject, i.e. the human individual. How is the practical activity of the human individual reflected in his/her own consciousness when the former takes on the forms unfolded in the previous sections? Or, to put it differently, how does the private individual see the social determinations of his/her individual action in order to organise its insertion into the system of the social division of labour? This question then occupies the bulk of Marx's attention in this section.

Marx's answer is that, as a private and independent human being, he/she is impotent to recognise that his/her action possesses social determinations that transcend the immediacy of its singularity. As a consequence, the human individual must project or transpose - hence confront - those individually borne social powers as external to his/her individuality and existing as an objective attribute of the product of social labour. Thus, Marx argues, it is not the case that commodity producers consciously



recognise the equality of their private labours as individual fragments of human social labour and thereby exchange them as equivalents, i.e. give them the form of value. It is the other way round. They give the products of labour the form of value and, through this reified mediation, they equalise behind their own backs their private labours. The constitution of the social objectivity of the value-form, albeit the product of their own brain, appears to the commodity-producers as a *fait accompli* springing by nature from the materiality of the product of labour. In sum, the consciousness of the commodity producer is, *in its most general form*, an apparent, inverted consciousness. As the bearer of that form of consciousness, the human individual is unable to recognise the necessity - the determinations - of his/her action beyond the appearances presented by the latter.

From this simplest determination of the consciousness of the commodity producer, Marx then proceeds to unfold its more concrete development. As the exchange of commodities extends its role in social reproduction, the plenitude of which is reached in capitalist society where it becomes the general social relation, this inverted consciousness starts to regulate the direct production process itself. Under those circumstances, already at that moment must the commodity-producer put his/her productive consciousness and will at the service of social powers which he/she sees as alien to him/herself, as belonging to the product of labour. In effect, in order to organise his/her qualitative integration into the social division of labour, the producer must not only produce socially useful things, but exchangeable products; he/she must produce value. With this determination, Marx starts to make explicit the inner nature of the consciousness of the commodity producer: it is not only an apparent consciousness but, more concretely, an alienated one.

Still, it is only when the movement of the quantitative articulation of the social division of labour becomes regulated by the magnitude of value that the extent of this alienated nature of human consciousness can be fully appreciated. This because the degree in which the products of labour are exchangeable starts to vary independently of the producer's individual consciousness and will. Hence, in order to satisfy his/her qualitatively and quantitatively determined needs - thereby reproducing his/her natural life – the producer cannot but determine his/her consciousness and will as the servants of the capricious changes of the magnitude of value of the commodity he/she produces. In other words, he/she not only faces his/her own social determinations as alien powers borne by the product of labour, but the latter comes to control the producer him/herself. As Iñigo Carrera puts it, the commodity-producer can reproduce him/herself as a *person* only by acting as the most abject *personification* (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 3-4).<sup>54</sup> At this juncture we can now grasp the precise place of the section on commodity-fetishism in Marx's order of presentation. Inasmuch as it has the consciousness of the commodity-producer as its immediate object of exposition, it can only appear *after* the analytic and synthetic development of the determinations of the value-form. The reason for this is that the the determinations unfolded in the former are nothing more than the forms in which the latter concretely develop. To put it plainly, *the consciousness of the commodity-producer is a concrete form in which*

---

<sup>54</sup> The rest of the section deals with the *ideological* scientific form of the alienated consciousness of the modern individual (political economy) and with general comments on other social forms and their respective forms of social consciousness. The latter are external observations in the dialectical presentation which evidently play a didactic or pedagogical role by helping emphasise the specificity of capitalist social forms.



*the commodity, as the formal subject of the process of human metabolism, realises its own determinations.*

The full significance of this order of determination is manifested in Chapter 2, in which, as anticipated above, Marx presents that alienated consciousness in motion, effectively acting. In other words, when he presents the process of exchange as the concrete realisation of the social relation materialised in the commodity. After analytically penetrating the immediate appearance that it is the human individual who consciously and voluntarily controls the product of labour, Marx sets out to unfold the realisation of the essential determination with which the previous section finished, namely: in capitalist society, 'the characters who appear on the economic stage are merely personifications of economic relations: it is as the bearers of these economic relations that they come into contact with each other' (Marx 1976a: 179). What follows, then, is the alienated action of individuals determined as personifications who, through their unconsciously organised social action, cannot help manifesting by way of their 'natural instinct' the 'natural laws of the commodity' discovered in Chapter 1 (Marx 1976a: 180). In effect, out of the development of the exchange process necessarily crystallises the money-form of the commodity. The value-form of the product of labour affirms itself as an abstract form through its self-negation, that is, by realising its own necessity in the form of the atomistic action of commodity owners.<sup>55</sup> Hence the importance of grasping not only the unity between the section on commodity fetishism and the rest of Chapter 1, but also of accounting for the crucial presentational unity between the latter as a whole and Chapter 2.

---

<sup>55</sup> Arthur (2004a: 37-38) correctly points this out.

As the ideal reproduction of these real relations among forms of different levels of abstraction, the dialectical presentation cannot posit the fetishism of commodities - i.e. the inverted self-consciousness of the commodity producer - prior to the unfolding of the social relations which are ideally expressed in that historical form of consciousness. If it did so, it would, like it or not, fall prey to the idealist inversion of positing social consciousness as taking concrete form in social being. And since the times of *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels had made clear that such a way of conceiving the relation between social being and forms of consciousness entailed turning the real relations upside down. Maybe aware of the risk that his own exposition be read in that inverted fashion, in the first edition of *Capital* Marx explicitly stated the order of the relation.

First their relationship exists in a practical mode. Second, however, their relationship exists as relationship for them. The way in which it exists for them or is reflected in their brain arises from the very nature of the relationship (Marx 1976f: 36).

In order to appreciate the importance of this, let us briefly discuss Rubin's claim that the account of commodity-fetishism constitutes the 'propedeutic' to the account of the determinations of the value-form (Rubin 1972: 6, 61). In a nutshell, Rubin considers that the content of the section on fetishism is what in reality corresponds to the section on the form of value or exchange-value, i.e. the synthetic exposition of the reason why the product of labour must take the value-form. And this confusion should come as no surprise. Because, on the one hand, Marx's exposition itself contains the elements for an inattentive reader to be led to these mistaken conclusions. In effect,



in the section on commodity fetishism Marx interjects in the development of the alienated consciousness as such - i.e. in the course of the unfolding of the most general form of consciousness in capitalism - *repetitions* of points he had already developed when he was effectively presenting the determinations of the objectified general social relation (the objectified social being, so to speak). More concretely, the passages which are generally taken as offering the explanation as to why human labour must objectify itself in the form of value (Marx 1976a: 165-6) are actually external observations to the actual development taking place in those pages; maybe introduced, in this case, for didactic reasons, as a way of *reminding* the reader of the content of the previous section. The price for this is that the fluidity of the development of the immediate object of exposition is interrupted. That those passages are just external observations is evidenced by the way in which Marx introduces them:

*As the foregoing analysis has already demonstrated, this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them (Marx 1976a: 165, our emphasis).*

Now, no matter the problems with Marx's exposition, it is not there that the basis for Rubin's confusion is to be found. The problem resides, in reality, in Rubin's inadequate comprehension of the dialectical structure of the exposition in Chapter 1 of *Capital*. As we have seen, the place where Marx unfolds the synthetic movement from (private) labour to value is not in the fourth section - which corresponds to the (abstract to concrete) synthetic movement leading from value to consciousness - but in section three on 'The form of value or exchange-value'. And yet in Rubin's scheme

of things this section plays no fundamental part. Why? Because for him that section contains a *purely formal* development, which simply illustrates the different forms of exchange-value as modes of expression of value. In his view, there is nothing about the qualitative content that is affirming through self-negation in the mode of that formal development. So much so, that in the 275 pages of his book on the theory of value, the formal development of exchange-value only deserves a footnote. In which, moreover, Rubin only mentions the development of exchange-value to state that he will not occupy himself with the form of value but only with value as form.<sup>56</sup> No wonder then, that when he later in the book finds the reminder of the synthetic movement from private labour to value in the section on commodity fetishism, he is led to think that that development appears for the first time there and, therefore, constitutes its fundamental content.<sup>57</sup>

What are the implications of this misreading, so influential among contemporary followers of Marx? Basically, a conception of Marx's critique of political economy, and in particular of the section on commodity fetishism, one-sidedly determined as an

---

<sup>56</sup> If section three only contains a non-fundamental formal development, one wonders, then, why did Marx introduce in the first edition an appendix on the form of value? Besides, had Rubin paid attention to that appendix, he would have noticed that so much is the section on commodity fetishism a concrete form of the development of the form of value, that Marx introduced the latter discussion as the fourth peculiarity of the equivalent form.

<sup>57</sup> All in all, Rubin at least wants to preserve the introduction of 'labour' in the presentation in the context of the discussion of the commodity-form. But what to say about contemporary Marxists, such as Arthur (Arthur 1993: 77) and Reichelt (forthcoming), who attempt to postpone the introduction of labour as the substance of value until the development of the determinations of the capital-form? The formalism of that reading is thus taken to extremes.



exposition of the social constitution of the forms of objectivity of capitalist society. The transposed relation between human practical activity and its objectified forms of social mediation is exhausted in the constitution of the former as a hostile alienated social power standing above and constraining human individuality. But this inversion is not followed through to its necessary unfolding in the determination of the latter as personification of the value-form. This has the consequence of rendering the most general determination of human individuality in capitalism undertheorised, thus opening up the possibility of postulating an instance of exteriority between human consciousness and will (i.e. subjectivity) and the value-form; the former is thus seen as not fully determined as a mode of existence of the latter. As we shall see later on, this exteriority eventually hinders the full comprehension of what a consequent dialectical development of these abstract determinations necessarily leads to, namely: the discovery of the determination of (social) capital as the concrete alienated subject of the historical movement of present-day society. To put it differently, those readings fail to follow the transition from the fetishism of commodities to the fetishism of capital, that is, from its abstract determination as a formal inversion between subject and product of social labour up to its full transformation into a complete real inversion.<sup>58</sup> We shall leave this aside for the moment since it will be the topic of subsequent chapters.

---

<sup>58</sup> We refer to the fetishism of the commodity-form as formal inasmuch as it only pertains to the *form* of the process of social metabolism, its content remaining the production of use-values and, hence, of human life. At the level of the capital-form the fetishism is real because it not only refers to the form of the human life process but also to its *content*. As an attribute of capital, the alienated content of social reproduction becomes determined as the production of surplus-value, with the production of use-values, hence human life itself, as the unconscious result of its autonomised movement.

But there is another fundamental aspect of the determinations of alienated consciousness, which arises already at the level of the commodity-form, and which even the most sophisticated readings tend to overlook.<sup>59</sup> Admittedly, this is not explicitly posed by Marx in the section on commodity fetishism. However, it appears more clearly in the *Grundrisse* and, as far as *Capital* itself is concerned, it is scattered bit by bit in different parts of Volume 1, only explicitly to appear in the chapter on simple reproduction. Be that as it may, we think that it is implicit in Marx's *Capital* from the very first chapter: the other side of the coin by which the human individual sees his/her social powers as the objective attribute of the product of social labour is the self-conception as the bearer of an abstractly free subjectivity. To put it simply, in capitalism free consciousness is not the abstract opposite of alienated consciousness but the concrete form in which the latter affirms itself through its own negation. As we shall see, this insight has fundamental implications for the comprehension of that which, as we have been arguing, is the central aim of the scientific development of the critique of political economy, namely, the self-consciousness of the determinations of its own revolutionary subjectivity by the working-class. In the next section, we return to the discussion of commodity fetishism in order to attempt to make explicit what Marx left in an implicit form.

---

<sup>59</sup> The work of Iñigo Carrera (2003) drew our attention to this central aspect of Marx's critique of political economy, which is generally neglected in the Marxist literature. In what follows we draw heavily on his presentation.



### *Free subjectivity as alienated subjectivity*

As we have seen above, the historical specificity of the commodity-form of social relations resides in the constitution of private and independent production as the mode of existence of social labour. This, we have argued, constitutes the ground of the historical determination of productive labour as value-producing. The commodity producer is condemned to see the social determinations of his/her activity as an objective natural attribute of the product of labour. Thus far, then, the determinations of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer have been reconstructed on the basis of Marx's explicit account of commodity fetishism. The question we have to address now is the following: how must this private producer, who has projected his/her social powers as the value-form of the product of labour, see him/herself, in order to effectively act as the personification of his/her commodity? In other words, if the commodity-form is the *objective* form of existence of the alienated consciousness, what is its corresponding *subjective* form?

The development of the commodity as the general social relation presupposes the dissolution of all relations of personal dependence. The consciousness and will of the commodity producer is therefore not subordinated to any other consciousness and will in the organisation of his/her material life. In other words, seen in its immediacy (and that is the standpoint of all ideological representations of bourgeois society) the consciousness of the commodity producer is *free*. What is the actual meaning of this freedom when seen from the only materialist point of view, that is, from the point of view of the organisation and development of human productive subjectivity? Inasmuch as he/she is not subject to any relation of personal dependence, the private

individual has the *full conscious control* over the *individual* character of his/her productive activity. The 'tragedy' of this individual is that he/she is not the only one enjoying this apparently absolute freedom. In the same vein as every other consciousness and will is absolutely excluded from his/her own productive decisions, he/she is absolutely impotent to have any say in the organisation of the material life of any other process of individual metabolism, the organic totality of which comprises the metabolism of society. Hence the cost at which the plenitude of this control over the individual character of labour comes, namely: the absolute lack of control over its *social* character and the consequent constitution of the value-form as the reified mediator in the process of production of human life. And hence the need to put this free consciousness and will to produce an alien social power - i.e. value - in the best possible manner, as the only way to reproduce the producer's material life. The realisation of his/her freedom is his/her determination as personification of the social powers of his/her commodity. In other words, his/her free consciousness is, in reality, a concrete mode of existence of an essentially alienated consciousness.

The crucial point at this juncture is to grasp the real relation between this abstract freedom as autonomy or self-determination and alienation beyond any appearance of externality - or inversion - between them. Since we started our discussion in this section with the immediate appearance of the consciousness of the commodity producer as free, the discovery of its form of existence as an alienated consciousness simply appeared as the development through self-negation of the former. Thus the appearance could arise that the relation between form and content of the consciousness of the private individual is such that alienation is the mode of existence



of freedom.<sup>60</sup> But the point is that, although initially presenting itself in that way, the unfolding of the determinations of the alienated consciousness shows that the relation actually suffers - as it were - a reversal, and the former is revealed as an apparent connection. The real relation consists of alienated consciousness affirming itself through self-negation by realising its determination in the form of free consciousness. Hence it is not that this freedom as 'self-determination', abstractly conceived as a natural attribute of human beings, is negated in capitalist society by taking the form of an alienated consciousness which is constrained to produce value. It is the other way

---

<sup>60</sup> Gunn (1992), in probably one of the most sophisticated recent attempts explicitly to deal with this question within Marxism, clings precisely to that inverted appearance. For him, the whole 'trick' necessary to grasp the contradictory relation between freedom and alienation in capitalist society 'has to be to see unfreedom as a mode of existence of freedom' (Gunn 1992: 29). Thus he claims that, in reality, there is no such a thing as unfreedom, but only 'unfree freedom', which 'amounts to freedom contradicted, or to freedom subsisting alienatedly, i.e. in the mode of being denied' (1992: 29). We shall see the consequences of this kind of inversion below but, for the moment, let us just notice that, despite his references to dialectics being the ideal expression of the real movement, Gunn reaches these conclusions through an exemplar exercise in dialectical *logic*. He starts with an axiomatic (ontologically or transcendently grounded?) definition of the concept of freedom and then subjects this concept to the general *logical* necessity of 'affirming itself through self-negation'. In our account, by contrast, we started with a 'concretum': not the 'concept of freedom' but the historically-determined free consciousness of the commodity producer. And it was by concretely reproducing in thought the realisation of its *specific* potentiality as capable of ruling the individual character of labour but not its social determinations that we discovered its actual determination as the form of the alienated consciousness. Moreover, we also found the latter not in general but in its specific form: as personification of the value-form. Only *after* concretely unfolding the movement of these social forms we *recognised* the general form of motion as one of 'affirmation through self-negation'. But we did not justify any transition by recourse to that general form of movement of the real. This, we think, illustrates the sometimes thin line separating the dialectical *method* from dialectical *logic*.

round. In the material process of producing his/her life at this particular stage in the historical development of the material productive forces of society, individuals can only socially relate with each other through the production of value, i.e. as personifications of the commodity; which, in turn, produces in these individuals this free consciousness as its necessary concrete form. In short, in capitalist society free consciousness is the concrete form taken by the alienated consciousness. It is by seeing him/herself - and therefore practically acting - as free that the individual reproduces the subordination to the commodity-form. The affirmation of this freedom as abstract self-determination of the subject becomes determined as the concrete form of the movement of the alienation inherent in the commodity-form of social relations, that is, in private labour. The fetishistic appearances of the objective forms of the alienated consciousness are thus paralleled by the corresponding 'fetishism' of their subjective forms. We have seen the determination of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer as an apparent consciousness that cannot recognise in value the social determinations of its individual productive activity, thereby seeing it as a natural attribute springing from the materiality of the product of labour. In the same vein, the commodity producer is impotent to recognise his/her free consciousness as the necessary concrete form taken by the affirmation of its alienated character, thereby seeing it as a natural attribute of human individuals springing from an anthropological determination of the species. As Fine puts it, the other side of the fetishism of commodities is the 'fetishism' of the subject, the illusions of 'free creative practice' (Fine 2001: 87). In their unity, the value-form of the product of labour and the apparently free consciousness of the producer respectively constitute the most general, objective and subjective forms of existence of the alienated consciousness in the capitalist mode of production.



As evidenced by our reconstruction of Marx's account of commodity fetishism in Chapter 1 of the first Volume of *Capital*, his presentation of the determinations of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer does not explicitly address its concrete form of subjectivity as free consciousness at that stage. In general, the references to the latter appear in the context of more concrete determinations, i.e. at the level of the capital-form. Furthermore, only in the chapter on simple reproduction, when the plenitude of alienation is presented through the constitution of social capital as the subject even of the process of individual consumption, that the explicit point about abstractly free consciousness as the necessary form of reproduction of its alienated content is made. At the level of the commodity-form, the closest reference to this determination of free consciousness appears very briefly only in relation to its more concrete *juridical* expression at the beginning of Chapter 2. That is, it appears only in relation to commodity *owners* (as opposed to producers), in the context of the *direct* (hence conscious and voluntary) relation between two *particular* private individuals established in the process of *exchange* - the contract – through which the

*general indirect* (hence unconscious) relations of commodity *production* assert themselves.<sup>61</sup>

In the *Grundrisse*, however, not only are the juridical forms of commodity production subject to a more detailed treatment but, in addition, Marx makes the point about this determination of free consciousness as the concrete form of the alienated consciousness without ambiguity.

In present bourgeois society as a whole, this positing of prices and their circulation etc. appears as the surface process, beneath which, however, in the depths, entirely different processes go on, in which this apparent individual

---

<sup>61</sup> It is precisely those more concrete *juridical* expressions of free consciousness - the notion of personality - that recent contributions within Marxism have developed (Reuten and Williams 1989; Fine 2002) - in general on the basis of a critical appropriation of the pioneering work of Pashukanis (Pashukanis 1983). However, we think that the determination of free consciousness as the concrete form of the alienated consciousness already obtains at the more abstract level of the materiality of the organisation of the development of productive subjectivity. It is to this more abstract determination that we have been referring. As Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*, the juridic concrete forms taken by the free productive subjectivity of the private working individual are just 'this basis to a higher power':

Therefore, when the economic form, exchange, posits the all-sided equality of its subjects, then the content, the individual as well as the objective material which drives towards the exchange, is *freedom*. Equality and freedom are thus not only respected in exchange based on exchange values but, also, the exchange of exchange values is the productive, real basis of all *equality* and *freedom*. As pure ideas they are merely the idealized expressions of this basis; as developed in juridical, political, social relations, they are merely this basis to a higher power (Marx 1993: 245).



equality and liberty disappear. It is forgotten, on one side, that the *presupposition* of exchange value, as the objective basis of the whole of the system of production, already in itself implies compulsion over the individual, since his immediate product is not a product for him, but only *becomes* such in the social process, and since it *must* take on this general but nevertheless external form; and that the individual has an existence only as a producer of exchange value, hence that the whole negation of his natural existence is already implied; that he is therefore entirely determined by society; that this further presupposes a division of labour etc., in which the individual is already posited in relations other than that of mere *exchanger*, etc. That therefore this presupposition by no means arises either out of the individual's will or out of the immediate nature of the individual, but that it is, rather, *historical*, and posits the individual as already *determined* by society. It is forgotten, on the other side, that these higher forms, in which exchange, or the relations of production which realize themselves in it, are now posited, do not by any means stand still in this simple form where the highest distinction which occurs is a formal and hence irrelevant one. What is overlooked, finally, is that already the simple forms of exchange value and of money latently contain the opposition between labour and capital etc (Marx 1993: 247:8)

In this passage Marx raises two critical points. First, against those who want to preserve the forms of freedom and equality which emerge out of the simple circulation of commodities without its transformation into a process of capitalist exploitation, he states that simple circulation is just the abstract form in which capital's valorisation process - hence the exploitation of labour - appears. This is the

part of Marx's critique of modern freedom and equality generally – and correctly - emphasised within Marxism, usually in debates over the derivation of the state-form (Blanke, Jürgens et al. 1978). But note that Marx develops another aspect of his critique, which is precisely the one we have been highlighting. Namely, that even at the level of abstraction of the commodity-form, the freedom of private individuals is revealed as the way in which they act as personifications of the social determinations of their commodities. Their free consciousness is the concrete form of subjectivity of their 'existence only as a producer of exchange value'.

Leaving exegetical questions aside, our discussion should have made clear that even if not explicitly addressed, the whole section of commodity-fetishism is but the exposition of the determinations of free productive consciousness as the form of an essentially alienated consciousness. In a sense, the question comes down to Marx not having *mentioned* that the production of value entails an individual who sees him/herself as free. In reality, one could argue that such a determination is just a self-evident aspect of the notion of independent production, since to be independent entails not to be subject to any relation of personal dependence - hence, the idea of self-determination of the individual. Thus all that was needed was to unfold the same determinations presented by Marx in the section on commodity fetishism but with an explicit focus on the way in which those private producers must see their consciousness and will in order to realise the determinations of their alienated social being.

At any rate, the important point is not whether Marx said it or not but what are the implications of this discovery of the inner connection between freedom and alienation



in the capitalist mode of production for the determination of science as practical criticism and, on the other hand, what are the consequences of overlooking it. In the following section, we move to the discussion of these fundamental issues in order to show, once again, that only on the basis of the dialectical method can these questions be adequately dealt with.

### **Why does method make a difference? The implications of Marx's analysis of the commodity-form for the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity**

The discussion in the previous section allows us to draw a first provisional conclusion about the *differentia specifica* of Marx's *critique* of political economy, as opposed to political economy or sociology (no matter how radical or 'Marxist' in their political stance). Through the ideal reproduction of the determinations of capital, Marx discovers its historical specificity in the private form taken by social labour, this being the general social relation of production regulating the reproduction of human life and hence the development of human productive subjectivity. As an expression of this historical form of social being, the consciousness of the private and independent individual becomes concretely determined as alienated. This alienated consciousness acquires two concrete modes of existence: objectively, it takes the value-form of the product of labour thereby determined as a commodity; subjectively, it is realised through the apparently free consciousness of the modern individual. The most general defining characteristic of Marx's scientific enterprise as a *critique of political economy* consists precisely in the discovery of this *two-fold* determination of social existence (hence social consciousness) in capitalist society. As the essential *content* of

dialectical knowledge of capitalist social forms, those discoveries can only be the result of its *dialectical form*. In order to illustrate this, let us first see the consequences of the attempt ideally to apprehend the determinations discussed above through the lenses of *representational thought*, i.e. through *logic* (whether formal or dialectical).

In the case of formal logic, the question is very straightforward. Since it conceives of real forms as isolated immediate affirmations, freedom and alienation repel each other by definition. From this point of view, freedom is freedom, and alienation is alienation, there being no way that one could be the mode of existence of the other. If, as generally happens, it stops short at the more immediate appearances of bourgeois society, it falls prey to the illusion that the human individual is free by nature and that the 'objective context' of capitalist social relations allows that freedom to express the plenitude of its potentialities. This has been the simplest element defining the apologetic character of *bourgeois* social science. This is perfectly compatible with the postulation of this or that external limitation to the affirmation of freedom engendered by the autonomised regulation of capitalist social relations. In this case, adequate social reform by the state is conceived as being capable of removing those constraints, thereby leading to a kind of capitalism with a 'human face'. Still, formal logic has even made its incursions within Marxism. Rational Choice or Analytic Marxism is a case in point (Roemer 1986).<sup>62</sup> In this more radical version, this formal-logical representation could even find the constraints to the affirmation of freedom in whole 'institutions' which they see as defining the capitalist mode of production itself. For instance, capitalist private property, which is seen as limiting freedom by leading to an unjust distribution of social wealth, resources and/or capabilities. Hence, defenders

---

<sup>62</sup> An excellent critique of Rational Choice Marxism can be found in Bensaïd's recent book (2002).



of 'market socialism' see the transcendence of capitalism as entailing the preservation of the freedom and independence inherent in the commodity-form, which they take as given as the natural form of productive subjectivity of human beings, but without the inequality springing from private property in the means of production. In other words, they put forward a political programme which postulates the oxymoron of wanting to preserve the commodity as the general social relation without its necessary development into capital. Here formal logic provides these Marxists with another service: the respective existences of the commodity-form and the capital-form are just immediate affirmations, so we can have one without having the other.

This inability to grasp the real relation between freedom and alienation in capitalist society manifests itself in a more subtle way in the case of *dialectical logic*. The latter, we think, has been the way in which Marxism has been attempting to grasp the said relation between free consciousness and alienated consciousness, which can be seen as such an application of a dialectical logic. In this case, the issue is all the more relevant since it directly pertains to the central theoretico-practical question we have been tracing in this thesis, namely, the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. In a nutshell, the question at stake is the following: if the general social relation regulating human life in the capitalist mode of production takes concrete form in a reified consciousness, how is the overcoming of alienation and consequent affirmation of human freedom possible? The question turns out to be posed in terms of the relation between the form of consciousness bound to reproduce its alienation and the one embodying the potentiality of its transcendence, i.e. revolutionary subjectivity. And here is where - more or less explicitly - dialectical logic comes into play. Sticking to the apparent external relation between free subjectivity and alienated

subjectivity in the capitalist mode of production, the consciousness of the subject of revolutionary transformation - the working class - is logically represented as the antagonistic unity of those opposing determinations (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 222). What is more, the relation is not only grasped in an external fashion but becomes actually inverted. Hence, also falling prey to the appearance of 'free creative subjectivity' as the natural attribute of human beings, the dialectical-logical representation conceives of the latter as the essential pole of that relation which is contradicted by the coexistence of the reified pole, in turn seen as constituting the inessential or apparent side of that relation. Thus, working class consciousness is represented as the unity of an alienated pole ('false' or 'reified' consciousness) and a free one (the true class consciousness, corresponding to the essential being of the proletariat as the 'universal class'). In turn, each pole is assigned to a specific kind of action by workers so that some forms of working class action are conceived as being the affirmation of a false or reified consciousness whilst others - in particular, revolutionary action - is seen as the affirmation of the workers' essential freedom. The difference between the different currents arises by virtue of the precise way in which they conceptualise that unity of opposing yet immediate affirmations.

Still, we think that despite their differences and distinct degrees of sophistication and depth, a common thread runs through most of those conceptions. And this is the idealist notion that, somehow or another, the revolutionary consciousness embodying the overcoming of alienation derives from something external to the alienated general social relation through which human beings reproduce their life in capitalist society. In other words, that the source of the power to abolish the capitalist mode of production is to be searched in the (smaller or larger) irreducible element of free, self-



determining productive subjectivity, eternally present in human life. It is the immediate affirmation of this abstract freedom that is seen as constituting the substance of the revolutionary abolition of alienated social existence. As Postone rightly points out, the underlying assumption of that train of thought is that 'revolutionary consciousness must be rooted ontologically or transcendently' (Postone 1996: 39).<sup>63</sup>

Now, where does this notion of self-determining free subjectivity, which constitutes for those Marxist currents the content of revolutionary subjectivity, come from? Certainly not from the imagination of the theorist. When seen more closely, we can realise that it is in fact the concrete form of the alienated consciousness abstracted from its content, transformed into its 'logical' opposite and, from that apparent exteriority, posited as the source of the revolutionary negation of alienated subjectivity. On the other hand, we can now appreciate how this is just the other side of the unilateral reading of Marx's critique of political economy (and especially, the section on commodity fetishism) solely as a genetic development of the forms of objectivity of capitalist society. Because according to this reading the fetishism of commodities refers only to the social constitution of an apparently self-subsistent objectivity which confronts individuals as an alien and hostile power that dominates them. In this way, it overlooks the concrete form of free consciousness that is the

---

<sup>63</sup> As an illustration of this, see the contributions to the symposium on Postone's 'Time, Labor and Social Domination'. With the exception of Stoeltzer (2004) and Neary (2004), most authors explicitly distance themselves from the view that the subsumption of the working class to capital (hence alienation) is total and end up postulating a moment of human subjectivity external to its inverted mode of existence as the transcendental or ontological ground for revolutionary consciousness (Albritton 2004; Arthur 2004b; Bonefeld 2004; Hudis 2004; McNally 2004).

necessary other side of the constitution of that alienated form of social objectivity.<sup>64</sup> Emancipation is then posed in terms of riddance by that apparently free consciousness of the external coercion imposed by those modes of social objectivity upon its self-determination. In other words, that one-sided reading aspires to get rid of the commodity, money, capital and the state *precisely on the basis* of the concrete form of the alienated consciousness which is the necessary complement of the existence of those forms of objectivity.

As stated above, the *critique* of political economy is such not only for grasping in thought the inner determinations of the value-form of the product of labour as an alienated social form, but also for discovering free consciousness determined as the concrete form of alienated consciousness in the capitalist mode of production. By ignoring this second 'leg' of the critique of political economy, Marxism deprives the latter of its revolutionary character and condemns it to remain just another concrete form of the reproduction of alienated human activity. Thus, it thereby transforms the

---

<sup>64</sup> Some authors do develop and subject to criticism the notion of bourgeois individuality. But the latter is reduced to *individualism*, that is, to the *atomistic* affirmation of that abstractly free subjectivity. Hence, the collective, solidaristic affirmation of that very same subjectivity in the form of class struggle, is seen as the absolute opposite of alienated subjectivity (or, at least, as embodying the immediate potentiality to 'self-develop' into such an absolute negation of bourgeois individuality). See, for instance, Shortall's derivation of a 'counter-dialectic of class struggle' – i.e. 'the potential class subjectivity of the working class' - that 'comes to delimit the functioning of the dialectic of capital', and whose foundation resides in the presupposition of the worker 'as both a free subject and as *non-capital*' (Shortall 1994: 128-9, author's emphasis). By contrast, we shall show in the next chapter that the solidaristic affirmation of that abstractly free subjectivity is but a more concrete realisation of the very same alienated content, hence, of the reproduction of capital.



critique of political economy from the revolutionary reproduction of the concrete by means of thought into another logical representation.

### **Further implications: on the practical nature of defetishising critique**

Another methodological issue implicit in the above discussion is the precise nature of the method of critique involved in Marx's account of commodity fetishism. Associated with the aforementioned one-sided reading of commodity fetishism as an account of genesis of the most general forms of objectivity of capitalist society is what we can term a Feuerbachian understanding of Marx's mature method of critique, i.e. a kind of transformative criticism. Even in its most sophisticated versions this critique boils down to demystifying commodity-fetishism by tracing the human origins of that alien objectivity. In this sense, there appears to be no difference between this method of critique and the one in the *Paris Manuscripts*. The only difference would be that in *Capital* Marx not only reduces alienated social forms to their human content but also answers the question of why that content takes that fetishistic form. But the thrust of the critique is seen to consist just in uncovering the practical activity of human beings as the social foundation of value. But if the point is to change the world, then the subsequent problem is how to turn this insight into *practical criticism*, that is, how to convert it into emancipating conscious practice. And here lies the crux of the matter. Because for these readings that connection seems to be as follows: the recognition of relations between human beings behind relations between things constitutes the foundation of radical transformative action. Since the content of the value-form is our conscious practice, i.e. the 'determining power of

social labour', then it follows that we must have the power of giving our practice another social form and getting rid of the value-form. In other words, the transformative powers of our action are not located in commodity-determined practice itself but in the essential character of an abstract material content deprived of social determinations which is 'logically' prior to its perverted existence as value-producing. For those readings, this mere discovery of the human content of 'economic categories' suffices consciously to organise the practical critique of capitalism (Bonefeld 1995; Holloway 1995; 2002a).

According to our own approach, the question must be posed differently. The starting point of a truly dialectical critique of political economy must be our own conscious practice. Science as practical criticism is such for being the conscious organisation of our transformative action. Thus, the question we are investigating when engaged in dialectical research is the social determinations, i.e. the necessity, of our action (Iñigo Carrera 1992: 1).<sup>65</sup> Only on that basis can we come to know what concrete form our action should take in order to achieve the willed transformation of the world. As Lukács puts it in *History and Class Consciousness*, the question at stake is the establishment of the 'genuine and necessary bond between consciousness and action' (1971: 2).<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> On the relation between dialectics and socialist politics see also the suggestive discussion provided by Eldred (1981).

<sup>66</sup> As I have argued elsewhere (Starosta 2003), although Lukács correctly posed the problem of dialectical knowledge as practical criticism, he eventually *failed* in establishing that link between consciousness and action. This failure lies behind his relapse into the Leninist separation between scientific organisation and execution proper in the political action of the working class (Starosta 2003: 57-8).



Our own reconstruction of Marx's dialectical investigation of the determinations of the commodity-form (commodity-fetishism included) thus leads to different conclusions regarding the social determinations of our revolutionary action. True enough, in this process of cognition we become aware of the human content of the objective powers borne by the commodity. However, what follows from this insight is not that we therefore immediately carry the power to negate the commodity-form of our general social relation. Rather, it follows that whatever power we might have radically to transform the world, must be a concrete form of the commodity itself. And yet far from revealing the existence of that transformative power, the abstract determinations of social existence contained in the commodity-form show no potentiality other than the reproduction of that alienated social form. So much so that the free association of individuals (the *determinate* negation of capitalism) appears in Chapter 1 (incidentally, precisely in the section on fetishism) as the *abstract* opposite of value-producing labour and hence, as the *extrinsic* product of the *imagination* of the subject engaged in that process of cognition. Thus, Marx starts that passage referring to communism by saying 'let us finally *imagine...*' (Marx 1976a: 171, our emphasis).

Thus, the defetishing critique of revolutionary science does not consist in discovering the constituting power of a generic free human practice as the negated content of capitalist alienated forms, the former being the ground for our revolutionary transformation of the world. Rather, it involves the production of the self-awareness that the reproduction of human life in all of its moments - *including our transformative action* - takes in capitalism an alienated form. The immediate result of

the demystifying critique of the fetishism of commodities is to become conscious of our own alienation. This *is* our general social being and there is no exteriority to it. This means that fetishism *is total* which, in turn, means the social powers of our transformative action are borne by the product of labour. In this sense, the critique of commodity fetishism is only the first step in the discovery of whatever transformative powers we could develop in that alienated form.

To put it differently, the objective reality of the inversion characterising the commodity-form of social relations implies that the most general determination of our transformative action is not to be the abstract negation of value-producing productive practice (private labour) but its concrete form. Hence, we need to discover the necessity of revolutionary action to be *immanent* in the concrete development of the commodity-form and not *outside* it. Revolutionary action must personify a concrete determination of value-producing human practice. A necessity, however, whose realisation precisely consists in the abolition of value production itself.

If the reproduction of the concrete in thought shows that the determinations immanent in the commodity-form do not carry, in their simplicity, the necessity of transcending value-production, the search for the latter must move forward unfolding the subsequent concrete forms in which the former develop. That is, our process of cognition still needs to go through more mediations in order to become fully aware of the necessity of our action in the totality of its determinations, that is, beyond any appearance presented by it. In order to develop the plenitude of its potentiality this conscious development must reach a concrete form of our alienated social being which embodies a determinate potentiality whose realisation: a) entails the abolition



of alienated labour itself and; b) has our transformative action as its necessary concrete form.

The analysis of the commodity-form is thereby but the first step in the broader process of dialectical cognition through which the subject of revolutionary transformation discovers the alienated character of its social being and, consequently, of its consciousness and will (including its transformative will). However, when developed in its totality this process also produces the awareness of the historical powers developed in this alienated form and, consequently, of the revolutionary action that, as personifications of 'economic categories', the emancipatory subject needs to undertake. This is not the awareness of the *external circumstances* or *objective conditions* of a self-determining action. It is the awareness of the *inner determinations* of our alienated transformative action. Thus, dialectical social science does not look outside our action but, in penetrating its immediate appearances, goes right 'inside' it. In this way, the field of human practice is never abandoned. Only by virtue of its dialectical form, the critique of political economy becomes determined as the fully conscious organisation of human practice in the capitalist mode of production and, hence, as the revolutionary science of the working class.

Thus far, however, our critical reading of Marx's *Capital* has shown no sign of providing us with the consciousness of the concrete determinations of our radical transformative action. In fact, all references to the working class as the revolutionary subject were, strictly speaking, completely extrinsic to the determinations we had before us. Therefore, in the next chapter we jump ahead in Marx's dialectical presentation right into heart of the determinations of social existence taking the form

of the class struggle, in order to see the extent to which they shed light on the necessity of revolutionary action.



## **Chapter 5. Capital accumulation and class struggle: On the form and content of social reproduction in its alienated form**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter we have critically reconstructed Marx's presentation of the determinations of the commodity-form and shown the fundamental importance of his dialectical method for a proper understanding of those first steps in the critique of political economy. We have also discussed the implications of such an understanding for the translation of those initial insights into the conscious organisation of the practical abolition of the alienation inherent in the commodity-form of social relations. Thus, we concluded that, although those first steps already revealed to us the alienated nature of our social existence (hence of our consciousness), they provided no answer to the question about all the social determinations behind our radical transformative action, i.e. about revolutionary subjectivity. The very idea of a revolutionary subject, or even of social life taking the form of a political action, was completely extrinsic to the determinations we had before us. The reproduction of the concrete by means of thought thereby still needs to advance towards more concrete determinations of the real in order to account for the necessity of the practical abolition of alienated social life.

The main aim of this chapter is, therefore, to move forward in the critical reconstruction of Marx's critique of political economy up to the point at which, for the

first time in his presentation, he shows capitalist social existence as taking concrete form in an antagonistic political relation between classes. In other words, we shall discuss Marx's presentation of the specific determinations of the class struggle in capitalist society. Again, the discussion will be carried out in a methodologically-minded fashion so as to highlight the intrinsic connection between the specific form of Marx's scientific argument and its revolutionary content as practical criticism. We argue that, for Marx, the class struggle is a necessary concrete form in which the accumulation of capital realises its determinations. More concretely, the class struggle is the most general *direct* social relation through which the *indirect* relations of capitalist production assert themselves. This real relation is not grounded in the abstract general principles of structuralist methodology. Rather, it is the necessary expression of the development of the historically-specific alienation inherent in the commodity-form into its more concrete social form of capital. In other words, that real relation expresses the fact that, as an expression of an alienated social existence, *social capital becomes determined as the concrete subject of the movement of modern society*. This, we think, is the fundamental discovery of Marx's critique of political economy which, in turn, allowed him to find the determinations of revolutionary class struggle immanent in the historical movement of alienation itself. Moreover, we shall see that only on the basis of the unfolding of that determination is it possible to understand the limited transformative powers of the class struggle as a form of the reproduction of capital, its specific revolutionary powers behind its determination as the form of the latter's abolition and, finally, the mediation between the two.

In order fully to understand these determinations of the class struggle in capitalist society, it is evidently necessary to unfold the more abstract social forms which the



latter presupposes. The following section, then, briefly reconstructs Marx's dialectical presentation of the determinations of capitalist social relations whose realisation leads to the constitution of the class struggle as a social form.

**Capital: the *materialised* social relation that takes possession of the species-powers of humanity**

*Capital as the subject of the circulation process*

The point of departure of Marx's derivation of the capital-form is the result of the circulation of commodities, namely: money. As already mentioned, the circulation of commodities and its development engenders money in its functional determinations. The question arises, then, as to why it is necessary to start the exposition of capital with the money-form. Basically, because Marx, as in the analysis of the commodity, starts the analysis of capital with an immediate observation, i.e. with capital 'as it appears at first sight'. On a formal level, this point of departure reflects Marx's structuring principle of the different chapters around presentational nodes, with the capital-form constituting a new stage in an exposition which, again, takes the immediate appearance of the social form at stake as starting point. And in its simplest manifestation capital presents itself as money. What needs to be investigated is, therefore, the specific nature of money as capital in contradistinction to money simply as such. Through this investigation, Marx presents the *analytic* moment of the exposition.

All that our immediate consciousness can tell us about this specificity is that it resides in the *form of its circulation*. Whereas the circulation of money as means of circulation can be represented with the form 'C – M – C, the transformation of commodities into money and the re-conversion of money into commodities: selling in order to buy', money that is transformed into capital circulates in the form of 'M – C – M, the transformation of money into commodities, and the re-conversion of commodities into money: buying in order to sell' (Marx 1976a: 247-8). However, behind these two distinct *forms* of circulation a difference of *content* lies hidden. In the case of the simple circulation of money within the framework of the circulation of commodities, the content of the process is given by satisfaction of needs, that is, by individual consumption. In other words, the use-value of the commodity is what constitutes the immediate object of the circuit. In this sense, the aim of the cycle is external to the process itself. In the other case, on the contrary, the circuit 'proceeds from the extreme of money and finally returns to the same extreme. Its driving and motivating force, its determining purpose, is therefore exchange-value' (Marx 1976a: 250). This has a two-fold consequence. In the first place, insofar as both extremes of the cycle M – C – M are identical this process simply as such is meaningless. Consequently, the extremes must be distinguished from each other in order to acquire rationality. Inasmuch as they are *qualitatively identical*, the only possible difference (and hence, that which must become the aim of the process), is the *quantitative increase*. Thus, the adequate form of this process of circulation must necessarily be M – C – M', where the initial sum of money (value in its concrete form of appearance) produces through its movement a larger amount of value, that is, a *surplus-value*. Money which circulates according to this form becomes determined as *capital*.



Secondly, and in contradistinction to what happens in the circuit  $C - M - C$ , the aim of the process is not external to it. The motive force - i.e. the valorisation of value - is internal to the process, it derives from the movement of circulation itself. Once the circulation of money as capital is complete, we return to the same point of departure: a quantitatively limited sum of money. And if the latter is to act as capital it must be thrown back into circulation. This means that the process of valorisation of value carries within itself the necessity of its own renewal, giving the process the character of being *formally* boundless.

We started with the circulation of capital as it appears in its immediacy and found the production of surplus-value to be its content. The following point that needs to be accounted for is the source of the necessity of that movement. In other words, the phase of analysis still needs to go on in order to discover what sets into motion this process of multiplication of surplus-value. As with the analysis of the commodity, Marx presents his argument by first looking at apparent paths that the dialectical analysis could follow. Thus, it might seem that this process originates in the abstractly free activity of the possessor of money. However, as already shown by the analysis of commodity-fetishism, through their free conscious and voluntary action the owners of commodities cannot but act as personification of the social powers inherent in their commodities. Inasmuch as he/she is an alienated human being, the capitalist only realises through his apparently free action the immediate necessity of his/her capital. The movement of value, although mediated by the subjectivity of the capitalist, is not grounded in his/her consciousness and will. Thus, Marx discovers that *the necessity of the process of circulation of money as capital comes from the automatic movement of value itself* (Marx 1976a: 255). In becoming capital, value - the materialised social

relation of the private and independent individuals - turns into the concrete *subject* of the process of circulation of social wealth.<sup>67</sup> In turn, the commodity and money, the particular and the general mode of existence of mercantile wealth, become determined as transitory forms which value takes in its process of self-expansion. As Marx states,

(...) value is here the subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus-value from itself considered as original value, and thus valorises itself independently. For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus-value is its own movement, its valorisation is therefore self-valorisation [*Selbstverwertung*] (ibid., p. 255).

The alienation of the human individual thus reaches a new stage. It is not only about a process of social production mediated by the value-form of the product. Not even about one that simply has value as the direct object of the process of exchange. The objectified abstract labour represented as the exchangeability of commodities has taken possession of the potencies of the process of circulation of social wealth itself. This moment of the human life-process is turned into an attribute of the life-cycle of capital which has the production of more of itself, i.e. its quantitative increase, as its only general qualitative determination. This is where the formal specificity of capital as an *indirect*, hence *materialised*, social relation resides. Thus, the production of human life has ceased to be the content of the movement of social reproduction and is

---

<sup>67</sup> Robles Báez (1992) provides a useful discussion of these mediations involved in the constitution of capital as subject.



the unconscious outcome of the production of surplus-value, that is, of the *only* (alienated) content presiding the movement of modern society.<sup>68</sup>

Having discovered the generic essential determination of capital as self-valorising value, Marx's exposition turns to follow the concrete form in which this content, i.e. the production of surplus-value, is realised. The analytic phase of the exposition thereby gives way to the synthetic stage, which consists in positively unfolding by means of thought the previously discovered self-movement of capital as the alienated subject of that process.

As the dominant subject [*übergreifendes Subjekt*] of this process, in which it alternately assumes and loses the form of money and the form of commodities, but preserves and expands itself through all these changes, value requires above all an independent form by means of which its identity with itself may be asserted (...) Value therefore now becomes value in process, money in process, and, as such, capital. It comes out of circulation, enters into it again, preserves and multiplies itself within circulation, emerges from it with an increased size, and starts the cycle again and again (Marx 1976a: 255-6)

At this point, the exposition faces a contradiction: the determinations developed thus far are revealed to be impotent to account by themselves for this process of multiplication of value. The law that governs the movement of the sphere of circulation - that is, the exchange of equivalents - is incapable of explaining the generation of a surplus-value. As Clarke (1991a: 114) succinctly puts it, this process

---

<sup>68</sup> The emphasis on 'only' will become clear in the discussion below.

cannot take place within exchange, at least as so far developed, because exchange does not *create* value, it merely changes its form. It is certainly the case that unequal exchanges could take place, but such exchanges could not yield a *surplus* value, they can only redistribute a portion of an existing sum of value as gains and losses balanced out.

Although having circulation as its point of departure and hence, with this sphere as one of its moments, the process of value's self-expansion pushes beyond circulation itself. The movement of capital shows the necessity to find within the circulation of commodities a commodity whose use-value for capital is to produce more value than it costs. The existence of the doubly free worker provides capital with this requirement. As an independent human being, this worker can freely dispose of his/her individual productive powers. However, insofar as he/she is deprived of the objective conditions in which to externalise his/her free subjectivity, he/she must give his/her labour-power the form of a commodity to be sold in the market to the immediate personification of capital.

What are the determinations of the commodity in its concrete form of the labour-power of the doubly free worker? As any other commodity, labour-power is a unity of value and use-value. The former is thus determined by the socially necessary labour time required for the production of this commodity which, in this particular case, resolves itself into the production of the means of subsistence necessary to reproduce



the physical and mental powers of the labourer.<sup>69</sup> The latter is nothing else than the actualisation of the productive capacities of the worker, i.e. labour. As stated above, it is through the appropriation of the use-value of this peculiar commodity that capital is able to valorise itself. The exposition must therefore develop the determinations of the process of consumption of labour-power which occurs 'outside the market' (Marx 1976a: 279). In this way, we will see in the next section how capital not only becomes

---

<sup>69</sup> At this stage of the exposition, the 'historical and moral' component of the value of labour-power is an external presupposition to the movement of capital. Under these circumstances, that component expresses the conditions inherited from pre-capitalist social relations underlying the history of the genesis of each national fragment of the global working class, that is, the 'general level of civilisation' attained in a particular place at a particular time. This, we think, is the general determination underlying E.P. Thompson's historical study of the 'moral economy' (Thompson 1971). A complete investigation of the value of labour-power, however, should include the internalisation of that 'historical and moral' component as a moment of the expanded reproduction of capital. Now, although some elements for this investigation are scattered throughout *Capital*, Marx did not actually dealt in any systematic fashion with the qualitative and quantitative determinations of the consumption of the working class. We think that such an investigation would need to search for the content of those determinations in the historically-changing forms of productive subjectivity of the differentiated organs of the collective labourer, in turn resulting from the material forms of the production of relative surplus-value. Also, it would need to trace the way in which capital's relentless search for surplus-value leads to the creation of new needs. If we leave aside the limitations stemming from its structuralist method, the founding work of the French Regulation School by Michel Aglietta on the historically changing 'norms of consumption' provides rich empirical material to track down the relation between value of labour-power and the material forms of the production of surplus-value (Aglietta 1979). For a thorough critical assessment of Aglietta's book, see Clarke (1991b). Subsequent work coming from that school managed to trivialise whatever interesting insights could be found in Aglietta's original contribution. See, for instance, the general synthesis offered by Boyer (1990).

the subject of the process of circulation of social wealth but also turns into the subject of the immediate process of production.

### *Capital as the subject of the immediate process of production*

In order to valorise itself, then, capital has to take possession of the potencies of the human labour-process. Through the movement of material production that at the same time produces the reified general social relation - value – capital is able to carry out its real valorisation, which, before this point, was actually only potential. At this stage of the presentation, in which capital takes the materiality of the labour-process as a given presupposition (the *formal subsumption* of labour in capital), the only possibility to actualise capital's valorisation is to expand the amount of labour-power productively consumed by extending the working-day of the labourer beyond the hours of labour socially necessary to reproduce the value of labour-power (which therefore becomes determined as necessary labour). Thus, the secret of the immediate source of surplus-value is revealed: its origin lies in the surplus-labour that the labourers perform under the control of the capitalist to whom they freely sold their labour-power at its value. Consequently, this surplus-value becomes materialised in the product of labour which takes the form of the rightful private property of the capitalist. In other words, the valorisation of capital takes concrete form through the exploitation of the productive powers of living labour. In this way, it determines the production of use-values in the commodity-form as a concrete form of the production of surplus-value. From now on, the labour process becomes determined as the material bearer of the process of value's



self-valorisation. In this unity, the immediate process of production becomes a process of production of capital.

Although capital is essentially determined to be indifferent to any qualitative distinction other than the production of its quantitative increase, its material embodiment in the labour process produces its qualitative differentiation. It is clear that the production of use-values through which the production of surplus-value takes place, necessarily involves the organic unity of labour-power and means of production in order to put the labour process into motion. However, the only portion of capital able to change its magnitude is the one that is materialised in labour-power, which thus becomes determined as *variable capital*. The portion materialised in the form of means of production lacks this capacity and hence negates the essential determination of capital of being an inherently variable magnitude. The value of the means of production is transferred by living labour to the product and just reappears in the same magnitude. Capital is thus negated simply as such to affirm itself as *constant capital* which, however, constitutes a necessary condition for the affirmation of its power of self-valorisation. In short, the valorisation of capital can only take concrete form through its differentiation between variable and constant capital.

### **Valorisation of capital and class struggle**

The differentiation of the total capital advanced into constant and variable capital reveals to us that, on condition that a part of capital does take the concrete shape of means of production in the right proportion, the actual change of magnitude in which

the valorisation process consists immediately springs from the part of capital materialised in the form of labour-power. The inner measure of the degree in which capital self-valorises thus becomes determined by the ratio of the surplus-value produced to the variable capital (Marx 1976a: 324). This is what Marx terms the rate of surplus-value. From the perspective of its material content, the rate of surplus-value expresses in a specifically capitalist form the relation between surplus labour and necessary labour. The latter is the part of the working day necessary to produce the means of consumption which allow the reproduction of the labour-power of the workers. The former is constituted by the labour expended during the part of the working-day which goes beyond the labour-time necessary for the reproduction of labour power.

With the determinations unfolded thus far, the value of labour-power - hence the magnitude of variable capital - is a given quantity for capital's process of valorisation (Marx 1976a: 340). In effect, with the productive subjectivity of the wage-labourer and the material forms of the objective conditions of the process of production as an external presupposition, the means of subsistence which enter into the consumption bundle of the labourer and the productivity of labour constitute a given condition for capital's production of surplus-value. Thus, if we look at the circuit of capital's valorisation in its purity - i.e. assuming that the law of equivalence regulates exchange - the value of labour-power appears to constitute an external limit to the realisation of capital's essential determination as self-expanding value. Under these circumstances, the degree of capital's valorisation depends on the length of the working day, which, unlike the value of labour-power, appears in its immediacy to be a variable quantity with no inherent limit to its extension apart from the absolute one constituted by the



24 hours of the day. However, this appearance vanishes as soon as we consider the materiality of the process of consumption of labour-power; the physical determinations of the expenditure of labour-power already pose a limit to the prolongation of the working day. In addition, the very reproduction of labour-power in the conditions determined by what Marx calls 'the general level of civilisation' - and, which, again, are external to capital at this stage of the presentation - requires that a part of the day is spent on the satisfaction of the 'intellectual and social requirements' of the labourer.

It is only at this juncture that Marx, for the first time in the dialectical exposition of the critique of political economy, shows the necessity of the class struggle as a capitalist social form. In Marx's exposition, the class struggle is presented only as the necessary concrete form in which the physical and social limits to the extension of the working day are set. However, a closer scrutiny of Chapter 10 of *Capital* makes clear that its essential *simplest* determination is actually more general: *the historically-specific determination of the class struggle in the capitalist mode of production consists in being the necessary concrete form of the buying/selling of the commodity labour-power at its value.*

In order to appreciate this it is fundamental to highlight an aspect of Marx's presentation which could otherwise appear as capricious and extrinsic to the concrete determinations we had before us, namely: the calculation of the *daily* value of labour-power, which is the one that ensures the reproduction of labour-power throughout the whole of a worker's working life (Marx 1976a: 343). What Marx intends to show by means of that calculation is that the excessive prolongation of the working day

actually involves the payment of labour-power below its value.<sup>70</sup> Hence, the resistance to that extension in the productive consumption of labour-power beyond a socially-determined 'normality' is only a concrete manifestation of the broader question about the realisation of the full value of labour-power. This is illustrated by Marx through the words of that fictional average wage-worker who, in giving the reasons for his refusal to let the capitalist impose his/her will on the determination of the length of the working day, claims: 'I demand a normal working day because, like every other seller, I demand the value of my commodity' (Marx 1976a: 343).

The above quote has crucial implications. Because it shows without ambiguity that, in opposition to the claims of many contemporary Marxists, for Marx the social determination of the class struggle is not to be the antagonism between two different and irreconcilable principles of organisation of social life: the valorisation of capital and the production for human needs, or the 'logic of abstract labour' and the 'logic of concrete labour'. In this sense, the resistance of workers to the extraction of surplus-value does not immediately express (however 'contradictorily') the absolute opposite of the general social relation through which they reproduce their lives, namely, the

---

<sup>70</sup> The other side of this coin, which Marx did not seem explicitly to note, is that the value of labour power is not independent of the length of the working day.



valorisation of capital.<sup>71</sup> On the contrary, we think that Marx's analysis of the length of the working day in chapter 10 of *Capital* implies exactly the opposite: it presents the struggle of workers as a concrete form of the movement of alienated social life as any other form of their life-activity. In other words, though clearly an 'endemic' reality of the capitalist mode of production, the class struggle is not *ontologically* but *socially* constitutive of capitalism, since capitalist and worker, *as owners of commodities* (not as embodiments of ontologically different principles of social reproduction), personify

---

<sup>71</sup> For instance, the 'recalcitrance of use-value' (Arthur 2001b) to the pure dialectic of the value-form, 'a world of pure form empty of content' (Arthur 2001a: 33). One could argue that the essentials of this train of thought can be found, in different guises, in various traditions of unorthodox Marxism. See, among others, Cleaver (1979; 1992), Albritton (2003), Radical Chains Collective (1993), Kay and Mott (1982), Dunayevskaya (1988), Dinerstein (2002). The difference between these alternative versions resides in the specific determination in which they locate this radical 'otherness' to capital which sets into motion its abolition. What they all seem to have in common is the view that the revolutionary negation of capital is not an alienated necessity of the accumulation of capital itself, engendered by the latter's own historical movement, instead of being its abstract negation. And notice that we mean this in the profoundest 'dialectical' sense of intrinsic connection. That is, not just in the banal sense that the revolutionary action is 'produced' by capital because the proletariat 'reacts' to the miserable or inhuman conditions to which capital condemns it. Thus posed, the relation is completely external. The question is: which concrete historical potentiality of the valorisation of capital - the *only* present-day *general* social relation - carries within itself, as its only form of realisation, the necessity of its own annihilation through the revolutionary action of the working class? At the other extreme of those 'ontologisations' of the class struggle lies its 'biologisation' by Kautsky, for whom the class struggle was simply a human instance of the natural struggle for survival characterising the relation among species (Kautsky 1978: 201).

social determinations of the process of valorisation of capital whose realisation is antagonistic.<sup>72</sup> Let us return to Marx's text in order to substantiate this point.

Marx's starting point in his presentation of the determinations of the class struggle over the length of the working day is the individual direct relationship between capitalist and worker, whose antagonistic character, far from constituting the abstract negation of the indirect social relations regulating the circulation of commodities, springs from the realisation of those laws themselves. The capitalist, acting as the personification of the necessity of his/her capital, wants to extend the length of the working day as much as possible. As a rightful buyer of commodities, he wants daily to extract as much use-value as possible from the commodities he/she buys (Marx 1976a: 342); among them, the labour-power of the wage-labourer. Actually he/she is forced to do so by the competition from other individual capitals that mediates his/her determination as personification of the most immediate necessity of capital: the production of surplus-value (Marx 1976a: 381). The worker wants to limit that daily extraction. Actually he/she is compelled to do so if he/she wants to preserve his/her productive attributes in the conditions needed to be able to sell his/her labour power in the future. In other words, if he/she wants to get paid the full value of the latter throughout the course of his/her productive life-time. As we have seen, the struggle of

---

<sup>72</sup> It could be argued, as Shortall (1994: chapter 5) - building on insights originally developed by Negri in *Marx Beyond Marx* (Negri 1991) - and Lebowitz (2003) do, that our reading of Marx's presentation of the class struggle in *Capital* is perfectly accurate but only because Marx's account itself is one-sided and/or incomplete, leaving the struggles of wage-labourers which go beyond their determination as 'variable capital' out of the picture. Although these authors also give the class struggle an ontological foundation, they differ from those referred to above in that they recognise that was not Marx's formulation, although it should have been.



the worker over the length of the working day is actually a concrete manifestation of the struggle over the realisation in full of the value of labour-power.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, Marx concludes, the very operation of the *indirect* laws of commodity exchange leads to equally rightful but antagonistic stands on the length of the working. The resolution of this antinomy makes the valorisation of capital take the concrete form of a *direct* social relation of *force*:

There is here therefore an antinomy, of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides. Hence, in the history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day presents itself as a struggle over the limits of that day, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working class. (Marx 1976a: 344)

The point to note here is that although Marx claims that that direct social relation is actually a class relation, the determinations unfolded thus far do not show any necessity for such transition from the individual antagonism between capitalist and worker to its constitution as *class* struggle. In reality, that observation is at this stage of an external character, an anticipation of the actual presentation of the determinations of the valorisation process that make it take the form of an antagonism

---

<sup>73</sup> Hence, we can see now that every circumstance affecting the reproduction of labour-power - such as the intensity of labour, the wage, health and safety of working conditions, and so on - is a concrete expression of the question of the buying/selling of labour power at its full value.

between social classes. This presentation of the essential determinations of the class struggle Marx unfolds through a very long 'historical sketch' of the particular forms through which the former acquired concrete existence. Here, we shall concentrate on the general aspects of the determinations at stake, that is, we shall attempt to capture from Marx's account the contradictory tendencies of capital's valorisation process as such without reference to the concrete forms taken in the history of England as described by him.<sup>74</sup>

Marx organises his exposition by sketching out the way in which opposing tendencies regarding the length of the working day asserted themselves in the course of the movement of the history of the capitalist mode of production. Initially, he shows, a tendency to the brutal extension of the working day, which overstepped all traditional limits inherited from pre-capitalist social forms, made its way through history. In its general determination, this roughly corresponds to unchecked imposition of the will of the immediate personifications of capital in their voracious search for the utmost valorisation of their individual capitals, before 'the working class, stunned at first by

---

<sup>74</sup> Marx himself concisely presents the general determination at stake 'in its purity' – i.e. without its particular realisation in the course of the history of capital accumulation in England - in the preparatory Manuscripts of 1861-63 (Marx 1988: 180-5). On the dialectical-methodological significance of the notion 'historical sketch' see the seminal contribution by Müller and Neusüss to the so-called 'German State-Derivation Debate' (Müller and Neusüss 1975). In that text these authors highlight very well the need for concrete empirical study to see how the general determinations of capital accumulation unfold in the course of history in order to avoid the twin shortcomings of both an unmediated 'application' of the latter which would lead to a 'dogmatic history,' and the abstract empiricism of sociology and political science. More generally, Müller and Neusüss's reconstruction of Marx's argument in the chapter on the working-day is still one of the best accounts to date.



the noise and turmoil of the new system of production, had recovered its senses to some extent' and 'began to offer resistance' (Marx 1976a: 390). In other words, the realisation of that tendency in its purity manifests the determinations of the valorisation process as they take shape without the constitution of the sellers of labour power as a class, i.e. through the individual antagonistic relationship they establish with the buyers of the only commodity they own, as discussed above. Under these circumstances, the respective power of buyer and seller of labour power is systematically biased towards the capitalist. Thus, if between equal rights, force decides, there will be a systematic tendency for the immediate personifications of capital to impose their will regarding the duration of the working day. Which means, as we have seen, the strife for 'the full 24 hours, with the deduction of the few hours of rest without which labour-power is absolutely incapable of renewing its services' (Marx 1976a: 375). Whilst the capitalist could survive without buying the labour-power of any particular labourer, the latter faces the sale of his/her labour power, which is his/her only general social relation, as an immediate necessity. Thus, in the desperate attempt to establish his/her general social relation, the worker faces the competition of other individuals who can only personify the commodity-form of their labour-power. Although at this stage it cannot be but an external reflection, Marx points out that even immediate observation suffices to see how the very movement of the alienated regulation of social life engenders the existence of a surplus population relative to the needs of capital's valorisation process, thus making evident that not all workers will be able to sell their labour-power and thereby placing them in a relation of exacerbated competition. Hence the capitalist knows that he/she will always find a worker willing to sell his/her labour-power, however long the working day might be:

What experience generally shows to the capitalist is a constant excess of population, i.e., an excess to capital's need for valorization at a given moment, although this throng of people is made up of generations of stunned, short-lived, and rapidly replaced human beings, plucked, so to speak, before they were ripe (Marx 1976a: 380).

Marx then goes on to show the consequences of the pure operation of this tendency for the lengthening of the working day when the fixation of its limits is left to the unilateral action of the immediate personifications of capital, namely: the impossibility of workers to reproduce their labour-power in the very conditions that the valorisation of capital demands from them, which means, sooner or later, the impossibility of reproducing labour-power as such.

By extending the working day, therefore, capitalist production, which is essentially the production of surplus-value, the absorption of surplus labour, not only produces a deterioration of human labour-power by robbing it of its normal moral and physical conditions of development and activity, but also produces the premature exhaustion and death of this labour-power itself (Marx 1976a: 376).

More generally, this implies that, when considered at the level of the individual antagonistic relationship between capitalist and worker, the valorisation of capital inevitably leads to a tendency for labour-power to be sold *systematically below* its value. However appealing this might be to the voracious appetite for an extra surplus-value of the individual capital, this *immediate* necessity goes against the *mediated*



necessity of the reproduction of the valorisation of capital as such to prevent the productive attributes of labour-power - the one and only *direct* source of surplus-value, hence of self-expansion - from exhaustion. Marx points this out by looking at this same phenomenon from another angle, i.e. by commenting on what would happen if labour power was sold at its value but for an unnaturally prolonged working day:

If then the unnatural extension of the working day (...) shortens the life of the individual worker, and therefore the duration of his labour-power, the forces used up have to be replaced more rapidly, and it will be more expensive to reproduce labour-power (...) It would seem, therefore, that the interest of capital itself points in the direction of a normal working day (Marx 1976a: 377).

It is this other necessity of the valorisation of capital that takes shape through the antagonistic will of the worker, who tries to limit his/her conscious and voluntary subjection to the will of the capitalist in the immediate production process. And this is what gives rise to the opposite tendency of the valorisation of capital regarding the length of the working day, whose concrete realisation takes the form of the struggle of workers as a class. Marx illustrates this by showing how only the long and protracted resistance of workers eventually led to the intervention of the capitalist state, which, in the alienated form of a law, imposed the direct general regulation of the extensive quantitative limit to the productive consumption of labour-power by individual capitals. Which, seen from the perspective of the worker, appears as the only way of securing his/her material and social reproduction, that is, of getting paid the full value of labour-power. And he/she can only succeed at this - on average, through the

cyclical oscillation of the wage around the value of labour power - by establishing a relation of conscious co-operation with the rest of the workers in order to sell their labour power as a collective force. The general relation of competition among sellers of labour-power is thus realised in the form of its self-negation, i.e. by taking the form of a relation of solidarity.<sup>75</sup> Hence the social constitution of antagonistic *class* wills or the necessary concrete form of *class struggle* taken by the reproduction of the alienated existence of social life.

For 'protection' against the serpent of their agonies, the workers have to put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital (Marx 1976a: 416).

Thus far the textual reconstruction of the determinations of the class struggle in the capitalist mode of production, as they derive from their systematic place in Marx's dialectical presentation of the critique of political economy. As the above quote from *Capital* makes clear, in its simplest and most general form the class struggle carries no content other than the establishment of the conditions for the preservation and reproduction of the productive attributes of workers as wage-labourers. That is, it is

---

<sup>75</sup> Here we have the same point that the young Marx made against Proudhon that we commented upon in the first part of the thesis, namely: that co-operation or solidarity is not the abstract opposite of competition but its necessary concrete form when labour-power becomes a commodity. However, here the same conclusion is reached by Marx after unfolding all the determinations presupposed by it, thus eliminating the traces of externality in the relation between those two social forms that his presentation in the *Poverty of Philosophy* had.



the necessary form of the buying/selling of the commodity 'labour-power' at its full value. More generally, this implies that the determinations implicated in the mere existence of labour-power as commodity (or the merely formal subsumption of labour to capital) do not give the class struggle the transformative potentiality to go beyond the capitalist mode of production (Postone 1978). In this simple determination, the political action of the working class is just determined as a concrete form of the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Although for the first time in our reconstruction of Marx's reproduction of the concrete by means of thought we faced the necessity of capitalist social life to take the form of a political action of the working class, nothing in our journey put us before the necessity of the abolition of capital or, *a fortiori*, of the political action of the working class as its concrete form.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> In order to avoid misunderstandings, let us note that we do not restrict the determination of the class struggle as a *political* action to the conquest of state power or to an action involving demands directed at the state. The political determination of the class struggle springs from the *objectively general* scope of the antagonistic direct social relation between capitalists and wage-workers (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 235-6). As Marx puts it in a letter to Bolte, 'a *political* movement' is 'a movement of the *class*, with the object of enforcing its interests in a general form, in a form possessing general, socially coercive force' (Marx 1965). Whether that general determination is manifested in the form of fragmented 'economic movements' or an immediately general 'political movement' is something which cannot be addressed at this level of abstraction. What should be clear is that the determination of the class struggle as the form of the sale of labour-power at its value does not simply involve the 'trade-union' form of the class struggle. Concomitantly, neither does that simplest determination of the class struggle mean that it will always be realised through the development of merely 'trade-union consciousness.' In other words, that determination may well manifest itself in *apparently* extremely radical forms of the class struggle. In brief, what is at stake in this discussion is the simplest *content* of the class struggle regardless of its concrete forms. The confusion between content and concrete form of the class struggle is precisely what lies at the basis of the orthodox rigid separation between economistic and political consciousness of the working class.

Our search for the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity must therefore proceed into even more concrete determinations. This will be the subject of the next chapter. For the moment, we would firstly like further to explore the implications of this determination of the class struggle as a concrete form of the valorisation of capital.

### **Some implications of Marx's exposition of the determinations of the class struggle in *Capital***

#### *Class struggle and the concrete subject of the movement of capitalist society*

The form of class struggle taken by the movement of capitalist society evidently implies the obstruction of the ceaseless movement of valorisation that constitutes the most general determination of capital as the alienated subject of that process. This could raise the question as to whether this determination entails the absolute negation of capital as the subject of the valorisation process, thus reducing the latter to a concrete form of the class struggle (Bonefeld 1995). Or, as commented above, it could lead to the conclusion that, since workers' struggles press in the opposite direction to the immediate necessity of capital personified by the capitalists, they must be expressing a different principle of social reproduction from the valorisation of capital. Thus, although it might be true that capital is the subject of the valorisation process, this does not exhaust the 'logic of capitalism as a whole', which is said to comprise the antagonistic unity between the political economy of capital and the political economy of wage-labour (Lebowitz 2003: chapters 4 and 5). Each pole of that unity in



opposition is seen as the concrete subject of its own production process and the realisation of their respective goals is seen as repelling each other - hence their antagonism. However, each side needs the mediation of the other for its own reproduction - hence their unity (Lebowitz 2003: 75-6).

There is no doubt that the interruption of the valorisation process constitutes the immediate negation of the most general necessity of capital as subject. However, as our reconstruction of Marx's argument has shown, the form of class struggle taken by the movement of society is actually a determination of the *affirmation* of capital as subject, albeit through *its own negation*. In other words, our point is that the social form of class struggle does not abstractly negate capital's condition of alienated subject but only expresses the necessarily *contradictory* character of its own movement as one of *affirmation through self-negation*. What the class struggle does negate is the condition of subject of the process of valorisation to what up to that point *appeared* to be the bearer of that social determination, namely, the individual capital. The fact that the actions of individual capitals undermine the reproduction of the very direct source of their self-expansion thus makes clear that the production of surplus-value is an attribute that exceeds the former's potentiality as particular private fragments of social labour. However, this does not reveal the class struggle as the self-determining force behind the movement of capitalist production, nor does it unveil the emergence an antagonistic principle of organisation of social life other than the valorisation of capital, which would be, in turn, incarnated in the working class. Rather, it only shows that the production of surplus-value is a potentiality of the alienated existence of social labour *in its unity*. In other words, Marx's exposition of the social form of class struggle evidences, for the first time in the pages of *Capital*,

that the concrete subject of the process of valorisation - and hence of the movement of alienated social production – is the *total social capital*.

The class struggle, then, is the concrete form of development of the antithetical social necessities generated by this alienated total social subject in its process of valorisation. The fact that the most *immediate* necessity of capital is the *formally boundless* quantitative expansion of the surplus-value produced does not imply that the limitation to that expansion is not a necessity of its own reproduction. However, we have seen that the latter is a *mediated* necessity, this being the reason why it cannot be realised through the actions of capital's *immediate or positive* personifications - i.e. the capitalists - and why it can only be *negatively or mediatedly* personified by the working class in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. Hence, when the workers struggle, they do not cease to be subsumed to the movement of reproduction of alienated social life. On the one hand, their subjectivity does not act according to a 'logic' abstractly different from that of capitalist commodity production. As we have seen, the relation of conscious solidarity established by workers in their opposition to the positive personifications of capital is in complete accordance with the specific form of their social being, that is, with their determination as private and independent individuals and, more precisely, as commodity sellers (Postone 1996: 314-23). Their conscious co-operation in the form of a political action is not the unmediated expression of a relation of solidarity between *human beings as such*. Rather, it is such a solidaristic relation mediated by the workers' condition as alienated human beings, that is, as *personifications*. In acting in this way without being aware of their determination as attributes of social capital – i.e. in seeing themselves as essentially free – they unconsciously personify a necessity of the



reproduction of their alienated general social relation, albeit one which is evidently antagonistic to that personified by the capitalist.

*Once again, the question of the dialectical method*

At this juncture we can now appreciate the methodological significance of this discussion. For the aforementioned notion that the political action of the working class ultimately expresses social necessities radically opposed to those of the accumulation of social capital rests on what we have seen in the first part of the thesis as the *logical representation* of the specific movement of affirmation through self-negation constituting the determination of social forms, in the form of a unity of two immediate affirmations. Thus, when the mediated necessities of social capital are only grasped in their immediate concrete form of existence as simple needs of the working class, the development of the latter appears as a social process regulated by different 'laws' from those of the reproduction of the valorisation of social capital itself. A process that furthermore appears to stand in external opposition to the needs of social capital, one-sidedly reduced to those immediate ones that are personified by the capitalist class. Moreover, this appearance is reinforced by the form taken by the circuit of reproduction of labour-power, which has the satisfaction of needs - hence the production of the worker - as its immediate result (LP-M-C . . . P<sub>LP</sub> . . . LP\*; C-M-C\* in its most general form).<sup>77</sup> From this, the conclusion is drawn that this circuit expresses a different existential logic or social ontology from that of capital's

valorisation process (M-C...P...C'-M') and, according to some authors, that it thereby provides the social basis for the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat.

In a nutshell, the general question at stake is about the social determinations both of the needs of workers and the social form of their satisfaction. Thus, it may seem that, at least outside the process of production, i.e. in the sphere of individual consumption, the freedom of the wage-labourer ceases to be a concrete form of his/her alienation. There is no doubt that outside the immediate process of production and in the process of individual consumption through which labour-power is reproduced wage-labourers freely pursue their own goals. Unlike the subordination to the capitalist's despotic will reigning in the immediate process of production, in the process of reproduction of labour-power the wage-worker appears to be freely acting as a 'being-for-self' and not 'for another', as 'one who approaches capital as a *means*, a means whose end is the worker for self' (Lebowitz 2003: 71-2). And yet the selling of labour-power as a commodity being the general social relation regulating the reproduction of the worker's life, he/she must apply that free consciousness and will materially to produce his/her productive subjectivity in the conditions determined by the autonomised movement of social life as an attribute of the product of social labour - i.e. by the production of surplus-value. The second sense of his/her freedom (the divorce of the labourer from the means of production) means that he/she can reproduce his/her natural life only by producing his/her attributes as a human individual in the material and moral conditions in which social capital needs him/her; that is, by producing himself/herself as a personification of the only commodity he/she owns. Certainly, in

---

<sup>77</sup> Where LP is the abbreviation of labour-power and P<sub>LP</sub> corresponds to the process of reproduction of labour-power through individual consumption.



this process of self-production the wage-labourer is not subsumed to the cycle of valorisation of the individual capital and, therefore, he/she does not act for this or that particular 'other'. However, the whole gist of Marx's arguments aims at showing that, precisely through this free individual consumption (which, certainly, can only be secured by the class struggle), the worker reproduces his/her subsumption to *social capital*, which thereby affirms itself as the concrete subject not only of the processes of production and circulation of social wealth, but also of the process of individual consumption.

The individual consumption of the worker, whether it occurs inside or outside the workshop, inside or outside the labour process, remains an aspect of the production and reproduction of capital (...) The fact that the worker performs acts of individual consumption in his own interest, and not to please the capitalist, is something entirely irrelevant to the matter (...) The maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker's drive for self-preservation and propagation (Marx 1976a: 718)

In short, the individual consumption of the labourer is neither for the individual capital nor for himself/herself, but for social capital. The cycle  $LP-M-C \dots P_{LP} \dots LP^*$  is a moment of the accumulation of capital - and hence of capital's 'goal' of self-valorisation - as any other aspect of alienated social reproduction.

As we can see, there is no exteriority to the alienated social relations of capital. Therefore, any revolutionary will and actual *material powers* to go beyond them the

workers might have can only derive from this complete subsumption of humanity to capital's 'principle' of valorisation. With the determinations unfolded thus far, the class struggle embodies no transformative potentiality other than being the form in which labour-power is sold at its value and, therefore, a form of the reproduction of the alienation of human productive powers in the form of capital. And yet even in this simple form, the class struggle puts us before a determination which, although unable to account for the content of the necessity for the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, already sheds light on the reason why the latter can only have a political action of the working class as its form. We are referring to the fact that the class struggle is the most general form taken by the organisation of social labour through a conscious and voluntary collective action in capitalist society (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 6-7). This because determining the value of labour-power entails the determination of the way in which the total labour-power of society is allocated into its different useful forms; in this case, the general division between necessary labour and surplus-labour. And we have seen how this is resolved in the capitalist mode of production through the establishment of a direct relation of solidarity among workers in order to develop a consciously organised collective action. On the other hand, the annihilation of capital through the creation of the society of the consciously - hence concretely free - associated producers precisely consists of a social action of such a nature. Evidently, the latter is a social action which no longer expresses social capital's need for labour-power being sold at its value. Rather, it expresses the historically-determined necessity to move forward in the development of human productive subjectivity in a form which negates capital's existence as the general social relation reproducing human life, namely: by giving the materiality of social life the social form of its conscious general organisation as an attribute borne by each of the associated



individuals. But the point is that the *material content* of this transformation is achieved in the *form* of the political action of the (self-abolishing) proletariat, only because the latter already contains, within its simplest form, the potentiality of being the necessary concrete form taken by the general conscious organisation of social labour as a moment of the reproduction of social capital.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> It is this determination that generates the appearance that the class struggle as such embodies the potentiality to transcend the capitalist mode of production.

# Chapter 6. Real subsumption and the genesis of the revolutionary subject

## Introduction

Thus far, our critical reconstruction of Marx's argument in *Capital* has dealt with determinations which belong to what Marx termed the *formal* subsumption of labour to capital, that is, to the concrete form of the production of surplus-value in which the materiality of the production process remains a given presupposition of the valorisation process. As we have seen, nothing in those determinations put us before the central question we have been trying to answer through our reading of Marx's texts, namely, the necessity of revolutionary subjectivity. From a merely textual point of view and, as it were, 'by default', this already gives us a clue about the alternative place in which to search for those social determinations: the *real* subsumption of labour to capital. And, in effect, we shall argue in this chapter that it is precisely in the historical development of the ever-changing concrete forms of the real subsumption



that the answer to the question about revolutionary subjectivity that has been guiding the investigation in this thesis is to be found.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> A methodological question that immediately arises concerns the role of the different concrete forms of the real subsumption in Marx's 'systematic-dialectical' exposition in *Capital*. On the one hand, Tony Smith argues that simple co-operation – which, incidentally, he incorrectly sees as expressing the formal subsumption of labour to capital – 'does not characterize a specific stage in the reconstruction in thought of the value-form' (Smith 1990a: 126). On the other hand, he does admit that capital's necessity to transform the materiality of the production process of human life must have a place in the 'systematic ordering of the categories'. But the latter, captured by the category 'capital as principle of transformation', must remain at that level of generality, the specific concrete forms of the production of relative surplus-value having no necessity other than being arbitrary 'historical examples' among 'a myriad of combined and uneven forms' that could have been selected' (Smith 1990a: 127). Murray, for his part, correctly points out against Sayer (1987) and Balibar (1968) that all three material forms of the labour process belong to the real subsumption of labour to capital. However, he considers that only the general concept of co-operation belongs to the systematic dialectical argument, the three concrete forms of co-operation belonging to a separable historical dialectics (Murray 2004: 251, 258). Finally, Reuten and Williams simply exclude the concrete forms of production of relative surplus-value from their systematic presentation of the determinations of the 'bourgeois epoch' (Reuten and Williams 1989). In our view, a rigorous treatment of the qualitatively different concrete forms of the real subsumption must be an essential moment of the systematic-dialectical presentation of the determinations of capital. The chapters of Marx's *Capital* dealing with the forms of production of relative surplus-value are not there simply for the sake of an arbitrary historical illustration. Rather, as we demonstrate below, they are part and parcel of the dialectical unfolding of the immanent dynamic of self-valorising value and the transition between them expresses the necessary forms of development of human productive subjectivity as an alienated attribute of capital. Their exclusion from the presentation can only result in a formalistic comprehension of the nature of capital, which posits as contingent the relation between the latter and historical transformations of the materiality of the production process of human life. On the other hand, it should be noted that neither the distinction between formal and real subsumption, nor the one among the different forms of the latter, express pure historical phases of

All this should come as no surprise. In reality, this is no more than the concretisation of that insight about the most general determination of the process of 'natural-history' constituting the development of humanity, which Marx expounded in the *Paris Manuscripts* in 1844. As argued in the first part of the thesis, the content of the history of the human species consists, according to Marx, in the development of the specific powers of the human being as a working subject, i.e. of human productive subjectivity. It is in the historical transformation of its forms, Marx concluded, that the key to the abolition of capital - hence, to human emancipation - should reside. And yet we have seen that in 1844 Marx could only address that question in terms of an abstract and general 'dialectic' of human labour and its alienated form of existence.

It is precisely in *Capital* (and, crucially, in the *Grundrisse*), through the exposition of the determinations of the different forms of production of relative surplus-value, that Marx concretely develops that dialectic of alienated human labour, thus showing what capital accumulation does to the materiality of human productive subjectivity. The concrete question to be addressed thereby turns out to be the following: does capital transform human productive subjectivity in a way that eventually equips the latter with the material powers to transcend its alienated social form of development? From this materialist standpoint, only if this were the case would it make sense to pose the question of conscious revolutionary action as a concrete material potentiality

---

capitalist development on the basis of which to construct an abstract periodisation. The historical material in those chapters should be read in exactly the same way as the one from the chapter on the working day, that is, as a 'historical sketch' which, in its 'empirical' existence, expresses the realisation of the more abstract determination.



immanent in capitalist society. As Marx puts it in an oft-quoted passage from the *Grundrisse*,

On the other hand, if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic (Marx 1993: 159).

Marx does not specify in the above passage what are those conditions; it is in the course of this chapter that we shall discuss those determinations in greater detail. For the moment, as a way of organising the discussion that follows and as an anticipation of the direction that our argument shall take, it might be worth highlighting what, according to Marx, are the most general determinations of emancipated human productive activity, that is, of human labour which has transcended the alienation of its powers as attributes of its material product. Clearly, as a consistent materialist, Marx vigorously rejected the formulation of 'recipes (Comtist ones?) for the cook-shops of the future' (Marx 1976a: 99). In other words, he refused time and again to elaborate on the actual, more concrete forms that social life would take under the free association of individuals or communism. However, this did not prevent him from grasping the *most general or simplest* determinations of the social form that constitutes the determinate negation of the capitalist mode of production in the only way available to an individual living before the emergence of the material conditions for the abolition of capital. That is, he discovered those determinations of communist society in their present mode of existence as an alienated *potentiality* borne by the capital-form to be realised - i.e. turned into *actuality* - precisely and necessarily

through the conscious revolutionary action of the self-abolishing proletariat. Those determinations of really free human productive activity appear scattered and just mentioned in passing in several of Marx's texts, and they all characterise the simplest determination of communism as consisting in the self-conscious organisation of social labour as a collective force by the thereby freely associated producers. But it is in the *Grundrisse*, in the context of the critique of Adam Smith's conception of labour as sacrifice, where, we think, Marx offers the clearest and most concise characterisation of the general attributes of what he calls 'really free working'.

The work of material production can achieve this character [as 'really free working', GS] only (1) when its social character is posited, (2) when it is of a scientific and at the same time general character, not merely human exertion as a specifically harnessed natural force, but exertion as subject, which appears in the production process not in a merely natural, spontaneous form, but as an activity regulating all the forces of nature (Marx 1993: 611-12).<sup>80</sup>

The interesting and at this point 'intriguing' aspect of this passage is that Marx does not only claim that in order to be really free labour must become a consciously organised, directly social activity, but also that the consciousness regulating that emancipated productive activity must be of a *scientific* kind. As we shall see later, this latter attribute, scarcely mentioned by Marx on other occasions, will prove of paramount importance for our comprehension of the concrete determinations of

---

<sup>80</sup> This crucial passage has not generally caught the attention of Marxists. An exception can be found in Schmidt (1971: 143-44), who offers an interesting discussion of the determinations of emancipated labour.



revolutionary subjectivity; a task that Marx himself achieved, although not without theoretical tensions and ambiguities. At this stage, we would just like to reformulate the question of the relation between capital and productive subjectivity posed above in the light of that passage from the *Grundrisse*. Does the development of capital transform human productive subjectivity in such a way as to engender the necessity of producing the latter with the two general attributes mentioned by Marx? And furthermore, is the working class the material subject bearing them? As stated above, we think that the answer to this question lies at the basis of any attempt to develop a materialist account of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. It is not only a question of the mere will radically to 'change the world' but of the concrete *material powers* to do so. In this final chapter, then, we attempt to reconstruct the way in which Marx, through the analysis of the real subsumption of labour to capital, presented the general elements for such a materialistic account of the socio-historical genesis of the revolutionary subject, thereby determining the critique of political economy as the latter's self-consciousness of the social necessity of its political action.

### **The production of relative surplus value: general determinations**

With the determinations unfolded thus far in our reconstruction of *Capital*, that is, with the material conditions of production and the value of labour-power taken as a given presupposition, the valorisation of capital can only expand through the increase in the amount of labour set into motion by social capital. This, in turn, can only be achieved by the lengthening of the working day and/or by the increment of the number of workers exploited. We already have mentioned how the physical and social

limits of the former possibility are set in the concrete form of the class struggle.<sup>81</sup> The latter option has its ‘mathematical limits’ determined by the growth of the working population (Marx 1976a: 442). These barriers to the production of surplus-value are transcended by social capital by giving its valorisation the concrete form of the production of relative surplus-value.

The revolution in the material conditions of the social process of production, and the consequent *real subsumption* of labour under the rule of capital, constitutes the general determination of the production of relative surplus-value. In its different forms, the production of relative surplus-value consists in the transformation of the materiality of the labour process (and, crucially for our argument, *in the subjectivity of the wage-labourers*) in order to raise the productivity of labour and, therefore, reduce the value of labour-power and increase the rate of surplus-value. In this way, capital internalises the determination of that which, up to this stage, existed as an external presupposition to its power of self-valorisation, namely: the magnitude of variable capital. Notice that we are not referring here just to an abstract increase in the productivity of social labour unilaterally taken in its quantitative determination, that is, as the development of the capacity to produce more use-values with the same amount of labour. As we shall immediately see, the key to this development lies in its specific qualitative aspect (which also entails a quantitative determination), consisting in the advance of the productive co-operation of the labourers through simple co-

---

<sup>81</sup> Besides, the extension of the working-day would reach its absolute limit at the point of determining the whole 24 hours of the day as a means of producing surplus-value (Marx 1976a: 419).



operation, the division of labour of manufacture and the automatic system of machinery of large-scale industry.

### **Co-operation and capital's reason to be in the historical process**

In simple co-operation, the free wage-labourer must apply his/her consciousness and will to the realisation of his/her individual productive activity which, as with the independent artisan, still involves the production of the commodity in its entirety. However, in so far as he/she is *doubly* free, he/she must do so in the conditions imposed by the direct relation established with the capitalist (to whom he/she freely sold his/her labour-power) within the immediate process of production. On the other hand, the capitalist is able to transform his/her money into capital because he/she employs not just one wage-labourer but a relatively large number of them. Thus, the possession by the capitalist of a certain magnitude of capital becomes a material condition for the realisation of this social production process (Marx 1976a: 448).

The labour of these numerous workers working 'together side by side in accordance with a plan, whether in the same process, or in different but connected processes' (Marx 1976a: 443) takes the form of *co-operation*. *Simple* co-operation, the mere agglomeration of the individual wage-labourers under the same roof, produces a first transformation in their labour process by determining them as members of a collective

productive organism, a collective labourer.<sup>82</sup> The initial *formal* expression of this is the objective constitution of the expenditure of the labour-power of the co-operating labourers as *average social labour* (Marx 1976a: 440-1). However, beyond this formal aspect and the aforementioned constitution of a collective labourer, the materiality of the individual human productive subjectivity of the workers qualitatively remains the same as in pre-capitalist forms of handicraft labour. As Marx puts it, these developments in the process of production of human life derived from simple co-operation do not entail any major 'alteration in the method of work' itself (1976a: 441).

And yet, Marx notes, a *material* revolution in the conditions of the labour process does take place: simple co-operation gives the latter a *directly social character*. In the first instance, this mainly affects the objective conditions of the production process, which start to be consumed in common, thereby resulting in the economy in the use of means of production. But, in addition, the directly social character of the labour-process reacts on the subjective factor as well. Although the productive subjectivity of each worker remains unaltered, the productive powers of human labour do suffer a development. First, the human individual being a social animal, through this co-operation the productive powers of social labour are enhanced so that the worker 'strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species' (Marx 1976a: 447). Secondly, not only do the workers develop their individual productive powers, but a directly social potency is created, 'a new productive power, which is intrinsically a collective one' (Marx 1976a: 443).

---

<sup>82</sup> As Marx points out, co-operation is the 'fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production', whereas simple co-operation is its most abstract form (Marx 1976a: 454).



The significance of all this cannot be overestimated. For even these simplest determinations of the real subsumption suffice to put us, for the first time in our reconstruction of Marx's exposition, before an all-important aspect of the critique of political economy. We are referring to the discovery of the *material specificity* of capital. In effect, one of the central questions addressed by Marx's presentation in Chapter 13 of *Capital* is to show that, as a social form, capital not only entails a formal specificity - the inversion of human powers as powers of the product of labour - but also a material one. Or rather, it involves a specific material determination that can only develop through a specific social form. More concretely, *capital is the social form that transforms the productive powers of free but isolated individual labour into powers of directly and consciously organised social labour.*<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> The material specificity of the concrete forms of production of relative surplus-value has been generally ignored by orthodox Marxism, which tended to reduce the problem to a question of who manages those very forms of the labour process. A classic example of this is Lenin's claim, after the Russian Revolution, that Taylorism could provide in its immediacy the material forms of the labour process for a socialist society (Lenin 1971) - for a brief account of the evolution of Lenin's changing views of Taylorism throughout his writings, see Scoville (2001). However, it is not just a question of simply noting the specifically-capitalist character of the labour process and concluding that they cannot immediately provide the basis for a communist society, as many Marxists have done in opposition to the orthodox uncritical silence on this issue [just to name a few classic works from very different heterodox traditions, see Braverman (1998), Dunayevskaya (1988), Panzieri (1980)]. The crux of the matter resides in grasping the *relative historical necessity* of those material forms, which certainly express the alienated domination of capital over labour, as a *vanishing* moment in the process of development of human productive subjectivity and, hence, in the production of the necessity of their own supersession (Marx 1993: 831-2). This, on the other hand, cannot but be overlooked if the critique of capital-determined technology is conceived as the representation of the latter as the simple product

As Marx points out, co-operation in the production process can be found in earlier social forms of the reproduction of human life. However, those forms presuppose a very weak development of the individuality of the human producer, either because they are based on the common ownership of the conditions of production and on an individual who 'has as little torn himself free from the umbilical cord of his tribe or

---

of the class struggle, that is, as an attempt by capitalists to re-impose discipline in the labour process when faced with the insubordination of workers, the former in turn achieved through the arbitrary imposition of divisions and hierarchies (Cleaver 1979: 109-14; 1982; Holloway 1991). Seen in this light, the capitalist form of the production process of human life is represented as having no necessity other than an abstract power relation between the capitalist and the worker in the immediate process of production. Eventually, the logic of such an approach must lead to the very abandonment of the specific notion of the capitalist process of production as the unity of the labour process and the valorisation process to replace it with the abstract unity of the 'technique of production' and 'technique of dominating those who are producing' (Gorz 1976: viii). See also Marglin (1974) and Brighton Labour Process Group (1977) for other examples of extrinsic juxtaposition of power relations and technical forms. For a critique of this kind of approach, see Reinfelder (1980). This actually renders inexplicable the historical specificity of the material forms of the production of relative surplus-value. To begin with, the fact that 'co-operation remains the fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production' (Marx 1976a: 454). And secondly, as we shall see below, the universal productive subjectivity that such co-operation eventually entails when taking the form of large-scale industry. In reality, those latter approaches actually conflate two distinct determinations, both mentioned by Marx in the same section of *Capital*, pertaining, as it were, to different levels of abstraction, namely: the determination of the materiality of the production process as a concrete mode of existence of capital's production of relative surplus-value (Marx 1976a: 553-62) – the content – and the deliberate use of machinery by the capitalist as a weapon in the class struggle over the value of labour power (Marx 1976a: 562-3) – the mediating concrete form. The necessity of those material forms is grounded in the former. The latter is certainly a necessary mediation in such an alienated development of the productive powers of humanity, but it does not determine it.



community as a bee has from his hive' (Marx 1976a: 452), or, alternatively, because they 'rest on direct relations of domination and servitude, in most cases on slavery' (Marx 1976a: 452). Capitalist co-operation, on the contrary, presupposes a degree of development of the individuality of the labourer historically 'attaining classical form' in the form of the *freedom and independence* of the *isolated* individual labour of the peasant and the artisan, that is, on the basis of the *dissolution* of all relations of personal dependence (Marx 1993: 156).<sup>84</sup> As Marx puts it when summarising at the end of Volume 1 the essence of the historical tendency of capital accumulation,

The private property of the labourer in his means of production is the foundation of petty industry, whether agricultural, manufacturing, or both; petty industry, again, is an essential condition for the development of social production and of the free individuality of the labourer himself (...) (Marx 1976a: 927).

---

<sup>84</sup> That is why Marx centres the great bulk of his exposition of primitive accumulation and of the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation in the (violent) expropriation of the independent agricultural producer, which 'forms the basis of the whole process' (Marx 1976a: 876), instead of elaborating on the 'direct transformation of slaves and serfs into wage-labourers', which is a 'mere change of form' in the exploitation of the direct producers (Marx 1976a: 927). It is the former that condenses the essential material content of the social transformation at stake, that is, the specific historical powers of the capital-form in the development of human productive subjectivity. This point is completely overlooked by those formalistic approaches that reduce the capital-form to a relation of power and struggle (see footnote 88). Thus, to Holloway, the essence of the genesis of the capitalist mode of production is best captured as the process of conversion of the serf into a wage-labourer (Holloway 2002a: 180-3), i.e. as the 'mere change of form' of exploitation of the direct producers. The reason to be of capital in the materiality of human (pre)history is simply left out of the picture.

At this juncture it is necessary to emphasise that the mode of existence of social labour as private labour is not simply a juridical form referring to the fragmentation of the property of means of production (though that is certainly its *simplest* juridical expression).<sup>85</sup> But neither should it be understood as an abstract atomisation of social production unilaterally seen from an exclusively formal point of view. That is, as just another social form of the production process of humanity that constitutes the present-day objective conditions in which human individuals exercise their abstractly free productive activity.<sup>86</sup> As a social form, the private character of labour must be understood in its essential determination as a mode of development of the material productive forces of society borne by individual labour, i.e. of human productive subjectivity. Hence the most general determination of private labour discussed in the previous chapter: the absolute *material and formal* capacity consciously to rule the individual character of labour with no control of its general social character. In other words, it must be comprehended in relation to the *individually borne material powers of human beings* consciously to organise their own transformative action upon their natural environment, i.e. the productive consciousness of human beings as working subjects. If human beings invert their social powers as the value-form of the product of social labour it is because they have developed the individual character of their

---

<sup>85</sup> As Chattopadhyay notes, in the classic works of Soviet Marxism (including Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin and Preobrazhensky) there was a noticeable tendency to conceive of the social relations of production as primarily *juridical* (Chattopadhyay 1996). The 'juridicist' ideological representation can also be found in Kautsky (Kautsky 1978).

<sup>86</sup> As is the case, for instance, with the representation of the private character of labour as *dissociation* - which would constitute the *logical* negation of the 'concept' of *sociation* and with *association* (exchange) as the mediating term in the logical contradiction - by contemporary authors within the 'systematic dialectics approach' (Reuten 1988: 48-50; Arthur 1993: 71).



productive powers to a degree that cannot be further expanded under relations of personal dependence. However, the other side of this coin is that they have not yet created the universality of the material powers needed to regulate their social reproduction in a fully conscious form either. This is why the product of their social labour still confronts them as an alien power in the form of capital and the material development of their productive subjectivity takes the form of the production of relative surplus-value.

But it is an insipid notion to conceive of this merely *objective bond* as a spontaneous, natural attribute inherent in individuals and inseparable from their nature (in antithesis to their conscious knowing and willing). This bond is their product. It is a historic product. It belongs to a specific phase of their development. The alien and independent character in which it presently exists *vis-à-vis* individuals proves only that the latter are still engaged in the creation of the conditions of their social life, and that they have not yet begun, on the basis of these conditions, to live it (Marx 1993: 162).

It is the socialisation of that historical form of free labour – necessarily realised through the alienated value-form of the product of labour and through the relative mutilation of that individuality imposed by the second sense of the freedom of the wage-labourer – that constitutes the *reason to be* of capital in the history of the development of the powers of the human species. Although capital is the historical producer of the powers of directly social labour, it achieves this by subordinating the latter to the autonomised movement of social life alienated as an attribute of the material product of labour. In other words, those powers are developed by

determining directly social labour as a concrete form of development of the powers of private labour, i.e. as a mode of existence of capital's self-valorisation through the production of relative-surplus value.<sup>87</sup> The latter constitutes capital's *formal specificity*, the necessary social form in which the aforementioned *material* transformation of the production process of human life is historically achieved.

Just as the social productive power of labour that is developed by co-operation appears to be the productive power of capital, so co-operation itself, contrasted with the process of production carried on by isolated independent producers, or even by small masters, appears to be a specific form of the capitalist process of production. It is the first change experienced by the actual labour process when subjected to capital (...) This starting point coincides with the birth of capital itself. If then, on the one hand, the capitalist mode of production is a historically necessary condition for the transformation of the labour process into a social process, so, on the other hand, this social form of the labour process is a method employed by capital for the more profitable exploitation of labour, by increasing its productive power (Marx 1976a: 453).

The significance of this *two-fold - social and material -* character of capital's historical specificity cannot be overestimated. In effect, overlooking this material determination can only result in depriving the working class of the historical

---

<sup>87</sup> In other words, by determining free (productive) consciousness as a concrete form of the alienated consciousness. Or, to grasp it from a different angle, by determining the organisation of social labour in the form of direct (i.e. conscious) social relations in the immediate process of production as a concrete form of the essentially *indirect general organisation* of social labour through the valorisation of capital.



specificity of its revolutionary powers, thus making it impossible to distinguish the proletarian revolution, i.e. the political form taken by the fully conscious organisation of the social production process of human life, from the revolt of slaves against the personal domination of their owner.<sup>88</sup>

In a nutshell, Marx's uncovering of this two-fold determination of capital constitutes the first step - but *only* the first step - in the reproduction in thought of the socio-material genesis of the revolutionary subject. On the one hand, we can see now that the conscious organisation of the immediate production process of human life is not,

---

<sup>88</sup> See De Angelis (1995) and Holloway (2002a) for examples of such a formalistic understanding of capital. In a way, one could argue that these approaches ultimately remain refined versions of what Loren Goldner in the early 1980s insightfully noted concerning not just 20<sup>th</sup> century 'official Marxism' (broadly conceived to include authors as diverse as Lenin, Bukharin, Baran, Sweezy, Bettelheim), but also 'Western Marxist' currents such as the Frankfurt School, namely: the comprehension of 'capitalism (...) not [as] a system of valorization, but [as] a system of power', according to which 'capital ceased to be a dynamic and was transformed into a "hierarchy"' (Goldner 1981). The consequence of this is, as Goldner comments concerning 'Monopoly Capital' theory, the production of a theory which ceases to be 'about forces and relations of production' and becomes 'a *sociological* theory of hierarchy and oppression, the balance of forces between the classes in question being a question of struggle and will' (Goldner 1981). Whilst the approaches that constitute the explicit target of Goldner's critique tended directly to ignore the general determination of capital as value-in-process, the interesting thing about works such as those of De Angelis and Holloway referred to above is how they relapse into the same reduction of the critique of political economy to a sociological theory of oppression *while* at the same time paying lip-service to the categories of Marx's *Capital*. See Goldner (2001: 2-3) for suggestive reflections on the historical conjuncture underpinning this cultural mood of 'middle-class radicalism', which, unlike the Marxian notion of freedom as the fully conscious transformation of necessity, 'conceives of freedom as "transgression", as the breaking of laws, the "refusal of all constraints".'

as it appeared when we were before the more abstract determinations of social life synthesised in the commodity-form, the abstract negation of our present-day general social relation.<sup>89</sup> However, the determinations unfolded thus far also carry a *limit* to the expansion of directly social labour, thereby still determining it as a concrete form of the historical development of the powers of its opposite: private labour.

In effect, although the constitution of simple co-operation represents a step forward in the organisation of human life as a directly collective potency, this social power is not yet the self-conscious product of the direct association of the producers but is set into motion with the previous mediation of the sale of their labour-power as independent and isolated individuals to the capitalist. Therefore, since 'their co-operation only begins with the labour process, but by then they have ceased to belong to themselves' (Marx 1976a: 451), and their labour now belongs to capital, all the productive powers of labour that spring from the social combination of the workers are transformed into attributes of capital. In their very corporeality as working subjects, i.e. in the materiality of their productive subjectivity, the labourers 'merely form a particular mode of existence of capital' (Marx 1976a: 451) in its movement of valorisation. What is more, not only are those directly social productive powers of co-operation inverted as an attribute of the workers' materialised social relation, but its conscious organisation is not even exercised by them but by the immediate personification of self-valorising value, namely, the capitalist. Inasmuch as it is through his/her consciousness and will that the now collective conditions required for the wage-labourers' individual labours to take place (their co-operation) are posited, the capitalist becomes the conscious incarnation of the direct organisation of the social

---

<sup>89</sup> See page 198 above.



character of the labour of the group of workers under his/her command. For the workers, this social character thus appears in the ideal form of a 'plan drawn up by the capitalist, and, in practice, as his authority, as the powerful will of a being outside them, who subjects their activity to his purpose' (Marx 1976a: 450). On the other hand, inasmuch as it is not only oriented to the production of a use-value but to the valorisation of capital through the production of surplus-value – i.e. through the exploitation of labour – the direction of this process by the capitalist takes a despotic form (Marx 1976a: 450).

The determinations of simple co-operation thereby seem to intensify the power of the capitalist over the worker in the antagonistic direct relationship that they establish in the immediate process of production. This power is not simply the formal result of the separation of the labourer from the objective conditions of labour. Inasmuch as the capitalist concentrates the 'work of directing, superintending and adjusting the co-operative labour of wage-workers' (Marx 1976a: 449), his/her command becomes a material pre-requisite of the labour process itself. As Marx puts it, 'that a capitalist should command in the field of production is now as indispensable as that a general should command on the field of the battle' (Marx 1976a: 448). The dependence of the wage-labourers upon capital now starts to be expressed even in relation to the materiality of the production process. Far from moving in the direction of the determination of the working class as a revolutionary subject, these developments seem to deepen the latter's subjection to the alienated movement of capital's valorisation.

And yet the very same alienated form of their co-operation that, furthermore, strengthens the power of the capitalist, engenders a countertendency which presses in the opposite direction to the unchecked development of the latter. In effect, by putting the workers together under the same roof, capital facilitates the establishment of the relations of solidarity through which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the workers attempt to restrict the consumption of their labour-power by the capitalist (Marx 1976a: 449). However, Marx immediately adds, this intensified resistance does not yet express an absolute limit to the development of the alienation inherent in the capital-form. It only increases 'the pressure put on by capital to overcome this resistance' (Marx 1976a: 449) through the development of the despotism of capitalist command in the forms that are peculiar to it (Marx 1976a: 450). Eventually, capital attempts to break this barrier to its valorisation by revealing 'in practice' that simple co-operation is just one particular form of the production of relative surplus-value 'alongside the more developed ones' (Marx 1976a: 454).

### **Capitalist manufacture and the material basis of the class struggle**

Whatever the historical origins of the production process of capitalist manufacture - that is, whether it arises from a combination of formerly independent crafts into one collective labour-process of a single commodity, or whether its genesis is found in the analytical decomposition of an existing activity into its component parts - the essence of this concrete form of production of relative surplus-value consists in the division of the total labour necessary for the production of a determinate use-value into particular detail operations. The labour process of an entire commodity now involves the



articulation of those differentiated productive functions into a co-ordinated whole. As the resulting different manual tasks involved are assigned to what now become specialised workers, their labour becomes more productive (Marx 1976a: 458). With this increased productivity of labour, capital's production of relative surplus-value is consequently achieved. And this not just because of the enhanced productivity. Since the latter is the result of the simplification of the required necessary skills, the 'expenses of apprenticeship' are reduced - or almost disappear in the case of the unskilled type of labourer also produced by the development of manufacture – this having the additional result of *decreasing the value of labour power* (Marx 1976a: 470). Moreover, the fixation of the worker in a single form of activity eliminates the time necessary to change from one sort of activity to the other, permitting capital to *increase the intensity of labour* (Marx 1976a: 460).

These transformations of the productive subjectivity of the individual labourers have their counterpart in the way in which they are articulated organically as part of a single labour-process. In other words, those mutations result in the transformation of the determinations of the collective labourer, which actually becomes 'the item of machinery specifically characteristic of the manufacturing period' (Marx 1976a: 468). The latter no longer consists in the mere agglomeration of individual productive processes under the same roof. It now becomes a complex, directly social body differentiated into qualitatively distinct partial organs. In turn, these transformations not only make the qualitative articulation of the different individual labours a more complex process. It also determines, as a material necessity of the labour process, the establishment of a quantitative proportionality between the qualitatively different partial organs of the collective labourer. The individual labour of the workers in itself

ceases to be productive of commodities. This attribute now belongs to the integration of those particular and partial labours, i.e. to the collective labourer as such (Marx 1976a: 469, 475). The immediately social character of the production process within the workshop is thus no longer limited to the positing of its conditions but reaches the labouring activity itself, a point that Marx brings out by comparing the determinations of the organisation of the fragment of social labour under the command of an individual capitalist with the general organisation of social labour through the commodity-form across society (1976a: 475-77). Furthermore, since the renewal of the production of relative surplus-value involves the further development of the division of labour within the workshop, it becomes a law of the valorisation of capital that the number of partial organs comprising the collective labourer - and hence the conscious organisation of social labour - must keep extending (Marx 1976a: 480).

In this way, capital makes another step forward in the realisation of its civilising mission. However, it still does so by determining directly social labour as a concrete form of development of the powers of private - hence alienated - labour, so that 'anarchy in the social division of labour and despotism in the manufacturing of labour mutually condition each other' (Marx 1976a: 477).<sup>90</sup> As happened with simple co-operation, all the emerging powers of social labour deriving from this more developed form of human productive co-operation are turned into attributes of capital in its process of self-expansion through the production of relative surplus-value (Marx

---

<sup>90</sup> This point about the 'inner connection' between the general unconscious regulation of social life through the valorisation of capital and the despotic nature of the conscious plan inside the workshop (later on, the factory), has been correctly emphasised by Dunayevskaya and her followers against the uncritical celebration of the latter by orthodox Marxists (Dunayevskaya 1988; Hudis 1998: 103).



1976a: 486). But the subsumption of the powers of living labour under the rule of capital is now not only expressed in that inversion between subject and object of social production. With the manufacturing division of labour, the alienated development of the powers of social labour is furthermore achieved through the mutilation or degradation of the individual productive subjectivity of the wage-labourers, giving the conscious organisation of social labour within the workshop a *specifically capitalist character* not only because of its determination as the material bearer of the valorisation of capital and, hence, as an attribute despotically exercised by the capitalist, but because of the materiality of the production process itself. In effect, the specialisation of the worker in a single operation means that a one-sided aspect of human personality is developed, undermining all the potential universality of human productive capacities. The wage-labourer thus becomes a fragmented individual. If with simple co-operation the productive subjectivity (hence activity) of the worker became a *mode of existence* of capital, now his/her *corporeality as a working subject*, in its very materiality, becomes a *result* of the production of relative surplus-value.

While simple co-operation leaves the mode of the individual's labour for the most part unchanged, manufacture thoroughly revolutionizes it, and seizes labour-power by its roots. It converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity by furthering his particular skill as in a forcing-house, through the suppression of the whole world of productive drives and inclinations, just as in the states of La Plata they butcher a whole beast for the sake of his hide or his tallow. Not only is the specialized work distributed among the different individuals, but the individual himself is divided up, and transformed into the automatic motor

of a detail operation, thus realizing the absurd fable of Menenius Agrippa, which presents man as a mere fragment of his own body (Marx 1976a: 481-2).

The directly social powers of the collective labourer are thus developed *at the expense* of the productive attributes of the individual worker (Marx 1976a: 483). This specifically capitalist concrete form of human labour-power means that the direct producer actually further *loses* the productive consciousness of the unity of the labour process of the entire commodity - now immediately social within the workshop – which the simple commodity producer still preserved. The productive consciousness of the unity of the collective labourer becomes an attribute personified by the capitalist, the workers only keeping conscious control of the ever more partial individual activity, now only a fragment of the total labour process of the determinate use-value at stake.

The knowledge, the judgement, and the will, which, even though to a small extent, are exercised by the independent peasant or handicraftsman, in the same way as the savage makes the whole art of war consist in the exercise of his personal cunning, are faculties now required only for the workshop as a whole. The possibility of an intelligent direction in production expands in one direction, because it vanishes in many others. What is lost by the specialized workers, is concentrated in the capital that confronts them. It is a result of the division of labour in manufacture that the worker is brought face to face with the intellectual potentialities [*geistige Potenzen*] of the material process of production as the property of another and as a power that rules over him. This process of separation starts in simple co-operation, where the capitalist



represents to individual workers the unity and the will of the whole body of social labour. It is developed in manufacture, which mutilates the worker, turning him into a fragment of himself. It is completed in large-scale industry, which makes science a potentiality for production which is distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital (Marx 1976a: 482).

In this process, the alienation of the human powers of the labourer as attributes of capital reaches a further stage. What the workers lose with their subjection to the manufacturing division of labour is that specific human attribute that, as Marx discusses in Chapter 7 of *Capital* but had claimed as early as in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, distinguishes the human form of the appropriation of the forces of nature from its animal form, namely, the 'spiritual powers' of the production process or the conscious capacity to organise its rationality and purpose. Concerning the total labour process in which the workers take part, that which 'distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees' (Marx 1976a: 284) is stripped of their productive subjectivity. In this specifically material sense, capital is thus an *inhuman* social form of development of human productive powers.<sup>91</sup>

The subordination of workers to the rule of capital and the dependence of the production process on the direction of the capitalist that already started to appear with simple co-operation is thereby intensified in the division of labour of manufacture. The conversion of the worker into 'the automatic motor of a detail operation' means that the wage-labourer not only has to sell his/her labour power for not possessing the

---

<sup>91</sup> This inhumanity reaches its extreme with capital's production of a relative surplus population, comprising the workers who are literally prevented from the exercise of their own species being.

objective means necessary for exercising his/her subjective productive capacities. The crippling of his/her productive abilities means that 'now his own individual labour power withholds its services unless it has been sold to capital' (Marx 1976a: 482). The worker whose labour-power is now the product of the production of relative surplus-value does not even know how to produce an entire commodity by him/herself. He/she becomes increasingly forced to sell his/her labour-power to capital as the only means to reproduce his/her life.

And yet these very same determinations which appear to weaken the workers' resistance to capital's restless striving for relative surplus-value, engender a barrier to this affirmation of the materialised social relation as the concrete subject of the process of production of human life. The key to the comprehension of this contradiction immanent in capital's valorisation process lies in the very essence defining the division of labour of manufacture:

Whether complex or simple, each operation has to be done by hand, retains the character of a handicraft, and is therefore dependent on the strength, skill, quickness and sureness with which the individual worker manipulates his tools (Marx 1976a: 458).

That is, the production process of manufacture still depends on the crucial intervention of the handicraft expertise of the labourer. The structure of co-operation is purely subjective, gaining articulation only through the bodily motion of the individual workers as the fundamental material subjects of that collective labour process. The fluidity of the labour-process (hence, of the valorisation process which it



sustains) depends on the willingness of individual workers to act as partial organs of the collective labourer. Hence, this lack of ‘an objective framework independent of the workers themselves’ (Marx 1976a: 489) as the foundation of manufacture provides a *material basis* for an empowered resistance of workers in the antagonistic relation they establish with capital (Marx 1976a: 490).<sup>92</sup> This material basis, however, does not yet provide the class struggle with a different *qualitative* determination - whether being the form of the expropriation of the bourgeoisie or being the form of the abolition of capital - other than the only one we have already unfolded in the previous chapter, namely, that of being the concrete form in which the value of labour-power is set. It only increases the *magnitude* of the force borne by the working class in its political action.<sup>93</sup> Thus, the insubordination of the workers constitutes an obstacle to the valorisation of capital which does not yet express the need for the development of the productive powers of social labour to transcend its alienated form as production of relative surplus-value. As Marx makes clear, it only forces the latter to develop into a concrete form which undermines that material basis underlying the said obstacles to the domination of capital, namely, the system of machinery.

---

<sup>92</sup> This material basis actually engenders a countertendency to that increased political force through the fragmentation of workers caused by their insertion into a wage hierarchy revolving around skills.

<sup>93</sup> The relevance of this determination is not confined to the historical comprehension of the now very distant past used by Marx as illustration in *Capital*. It is crucial, for instance, to understand the peculiar political power of the workers during the so-called Fordist cycle of accumulation (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 47-9). In effect, especially concerning the production of machinery itself, and however degraded the productive subjectivity of workers, Fordist methods still involved the subordination of the adjustment and calibration of machines and even the assembling process itself to the manual skills of labourers.

One of its [manufacture's, GS] most finished products was the workshop for the production of the instruments of labour themselves, and particularly the complicated pieces of mechanical apparatus already being employed (...) This workshop, the product of the division of labour in manufacture, produced in its turn - machines. It is machines that abolish the role of the handicraftsman as the regulating principle of social production. Thus, on the one hand, the technical reason for the lifelong attachment of the worker to a partial function is swept away. On the other hand, the barriers placed in the way of the domination of capital by this same regulating principle now also fall (Marx 1976a: 491).

As we can see, the form of manufacture taken by the immediate production process further develops the contradictions and tendencies immanent in the movement of capital as alienated subject which were insinuated by the determinations of simple co-operation. In the first place, both capital's world-historical role in the development of the species-powers of humanity and its contradictory march forward in the historical process of its realisation acquire a clearer expression. Thus, in giving an immediately social character not only to the 'objective factor' of the labour process but also to the 'subjective factor', capital shows its historical tendency to produce at least the first of the two general attributes of productive subjectivity which, as mentioned in the introduction, are crucial for the constitution of 'really free working' - hence for the abolition of capital itself. However, the division of labour of manufacture also reveals the contradictory form in which that process unfolds. And this not only because the socialisation of labour is achieved by formally determining immediately social labour as a concrete form of the self-movement of valorisation of capital. This contradiction



acquires a further *material* expression in the mutilation of the individual character of the productive subjectivity of wage-labourers as the mediation for the historical production of direct producers with the material powers consciously to organise their social life-process as 'a fully self-conscious single collective labour-power'.

In the second place, we can now appreciate more clearly that the determinations of the class struggle over the value of labour-power are not exhausted in the *formal* subsumption of labour to capital. If one stops short at that level of abstraction as developed in Chapter 10 of *Capital*, the appearance arises that the balance of class forces - and so, for instance, the duration of the working day - is contingently determined. However, Marx's analysis of simple co-operation and, even more so, of the division of labour of manufacture, makes evident that there is a *material basis* for the respective political power of each class in struggle.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the further unfolding of the determinations of the valorisation of capital reveals that the materiality of the forms of the *real* subsumption of labour to capital *mediate* not only the transformative power of the workers' political action determined as the form of *capital's*

---

<sup>94</sup> In those two chapters Marx refers to the resistance of workers in general. Specifically concerning the length of the working day, the plenitude of this determination becomes manifest in the chapter on machinery and large-scale industry. There Marx shows without ambiguity what is the *material* determination behind its duration, namely: the inverse relation between its length and the intensity of labour deriving from the concrete material forms of the production of relative surplus-value, i.e. between extensive and intensive magnitudes of the exploitation of labour. See Marx (Marx 1976a: 542). Grossmann, in *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System*, correctly highlights the direct relation between the intensification of labour and the value of labour-power. See Grossmann, cited in Grupo de Propaganda Marxista (2000: 45).

*transcendence* (a point we have been making but still need to prove), but also that of its role as moment of *capital's reproduction*.<sup>95</sup>

We have followed the transformations of the collective labourer brought about by capital through the first two forms of existence of the production of relative surplus-value, namely, simple co-operation and the division of labour of manufacture. From the perspective of the development of the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class, these changes in the materiality of social life still do not equip the workers with the material powers to abolish capital synthesised in the two general productive attributes necessary for 'really free working' mentioned in the introduction. Although their individual labours increasingly become directly social, their work of material production is evidently *not* of a 'scientific and general character'. First, the very 'technically narrow basis' of manufacture - i.e. handicraft - 'excludes a really scientific division of the production process into its component parts' (Marx 1976a: 458). Secondly, far from developing workers with *general* productive attributes, we

---

<sup>95</sup> More generally, this also can serve to illustrate once again the importance of the dialectical method as the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of thought'. Here we can appreciate very clearly why we can see through all appearances presented by a determinate social form - in this case, the class struggle - only by grasping it in the *totality* of its determinations, that is, by making the full, laborious journey from the abstract to the concrete. Laziness and/or hastiness of thought thereby translates into impotence fully to comprehend - hence transform - the concrete; which, as Marx reminds us in the *Grundrisse*, is such precisely for being 'the concentration of many determinations, hence the unity of the diverse' (Marx 1993: 101).



have seen that manufacture involves an individual labour of a *particularistic* kind.<sup>96</sup> Our search for the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity must therefore carry on. Let us then turn to Marx's analysis of large-scale industry and explore if it is there that those determinations are contained.

### **Large-scale industry and workers' productive subjectivity in *Capital***

As we have been arguing, the guiding thread running through Marx's exposition of the concrete forms of production of relative surplus-value resides in the revolutions to which capital subjects the productive subjectivity of the doubly-free labourer as the means for the multiplication of its power of self-valorisation. However, it is not there that Marx's presentation of the determinations of large-scale industry begins. The reason for this derives from the very starting point of the production of relative surplus-value through the system of machinery characterising large-scale industry itself. As Marx points out, if in manufacture the point of departure of the transformation of the material conditions of social labour was productive subjectivity as such (with the transformation, in the form of a specialisation, of the instrument of

---

<sup>96</sup> The constitution of a section of unskilled labourers in manufacture, that is, of workers whose speciality is the lack of all specialisation (Marx 1976a: 470), does constitute a first insinuation of the emergence of labourers with universal productive attributes. However, this universality is not the expression of an expanded productive subjectivity of wage-labourers but of an absolute degradation. Moreover, the number of unskilled universal workers required by manufacture remains relatively small, the essence of the latter being expressed mainly in workers with particularistic development of

labour determined as a result of the former), in large-scale industry the transformation of the instrument of labour constitutes the starting point, the transformation of the wage-labourer being its result (Marx 1976a: 492).

Marx presents the essence of this transformation of the human labour process by developing the specific materiality of machinery, in particular vis-à-vis the labour process in manufacture. In reality, the simplest determination of that difference was already anticipated by Marx in the transition contained in the previous chapter of *Capital*, where the necessity of the development of machinery was laid bare. We are referring to capital's need to do away with the subjective basis of manufacture through the development of an 'objective framework' for material production, independent of the manual expertise and intervention of workers. In brief, it was about giving an objective form to the powers of social labour springing from direct productive co-operation.

The two-fold material specificity of the machine thereby springs from the objectification of both the - however restricted - knowledge and manual skills and strength of the manufacturing labourer. On the one hand, capital strives to substitute the movement of the forces of nature for that of the human hand as the immediate agent in the transformation of the object of labour into a new use-value. On the other hand, it attempts to displace the immediate subjective experience of the worker as the basis for the conscious regulation of the labour process, i.e. as the basis for the knowledge of the determinations of the latter. This implies, in the first place, the need

---

their productive attributes. Universal workers, on the contrary, are the most genuine product of the system of machinery.



to turn the production of the latter into an activity which, whilst clearly remaining an inner moment of the material process of social production, nonetheless acquires a differentiated existence from the immediacy of the direct production process. Coupled with the need to objectify it as a productive power directly borne by the 'dead labour' represented in the machine, that knowledge must necessarily take the general form of *science*. As Marx summarises it,

As machinery, the instrument of labour assumes a material mode of existence which necessitates the replacement of human force by natural forces, and the replacement of the rule of thumb by the conscious application of natural science (Marx 1976a: 508).

We can now start to appreciate how capital advances, for the first time in human (pre)history, in the generalisation of the application of science as an immediate potency of the direct process of production.<sup>97</sup>

The employment of the **natural agents** — their incorporation so to speak into capital — coincides with the development of *scientific knowledge* as an independent factor in the production process. In the same way as the production process becomes an *application of scientific knowledge*, so, conversely, does science become a factor, a function so to speak, of the

---

<sup>97</sup> We say 'generalisation' because capital did not invent natural science. However, by converting science into the general principle of material production, the production of relative surplus-value enormously fostered its development and continuous progress. And yet, it can only develop scientific thought within the limits springing from being an alienated social form. We shall come back to this crucial issue below.

production process.[30] Every invention becomes the basis of new inventions or new, improved methods of production. It is the capitalist mode of production which first puts the natural sciences [XX-1262] to the service of the direct production process, while, conversely, the development of production provides the means for the theoretical subjugation of nature (Marx 1994: 32).

Through this concrete form of production of relative surplus-value, capital starts to move in the direction of the social constitution of the second general attribute of productive subjectivity which the coming into existence of 'really free working' presupposes, namely: the determination of productive consciousness as scientific, thereby objective, in character. But large-scale industry does not only move forward in the production of this material condition. It also fosters the deepening of the first attribute, that of labour becoming directly social. In effect, with the system of machinery the co-operative character of labour comes to be a presupposition of the actual exercise of productive activity, whose necessity springs from the materiality of the instrument of labour itself. What is more, we can now see that those two general attributes are not extrinsically related but each one presupposes the other.

Large-industry (...) possesses in the machine system an entirely objective organization of production, which confronts the worker as a pre-existing material condition of production (...) Machinery, with the few exceptions to be mentioned later, operates only by means of associated labour, or labour in common. Hence the co-operative character of the labour process is in this case



a technical necessity dictated by the very nature of the instrument of labour (Marx 1976a: 508).

Thus far, then, these are the fundamental aspects of Marx's exposition of the *material* specificity of the production process of capital based on the system of machinery, i.e. the transformations it suffers in its aspect as a process of production of use-values. But the process of production of capital is such for being the unity of the labour-process and the valorisation process. Hence, Marx's presentation goes on to develop the specific impact of the system of machinery on the latter, which can be summarised in the following points:

\*As happened with all the productive powers deriving from the exercise of human productive co-operation in an immediately social form (whether in its simple form or through the manufacturing division of labour), the use of scientific discoveries costs capital nothing. They are natural forces of social labour that capital appropriates for free for the purpose of its valorisation (Marx 1976a: 508).

\*However, the productive consumption of the results of science involves the utilisation of ever more complex and costly means of production in an ever increasing scale. The capitalist appropriation of science thus entails an expanding magnitude of the average capital disbursement necessary to set the production of relative surplus-value, springing in this case from the growth of constant capital (Marx 1976a: 509).

\*This increment in the magnitude of constant capital is evidently reflected in the value of the product. However, the two-fold nature of the capitalist production process as the unity of the labour process and the valorisation process means that this reflection is not simple or immediate. Machines do not create value but living labour transfers their value to the product; and it does so only in proportion to 'its average daily wear and tear' (Marx 1976a: 510). On the other hand, they enter as a whole in their determination as a material factor of the labour process. This 'difference between the mere utilisation of the instrument and its depreciation' (Marx 1976a: 509-10), and expression of the powers of the objectification of past labour, is also appropriated gratuitously by capital.

\*However attractive these gratuitous services to capital's valorisation brought about by the introduction of machinery might be, the latter faces a specific limit *stricter* than the generically mercantile one given by the difference between the labour the machine costs and the labour it saves (Marx 1976a: 515). The reason for this springs from capital's valorisation taking concrete form through the appropriation of *unpaid* surplus-labour. Thus, for the capitalist, the limit to the use of the machine 'is therefore fixed by the



difference between the value of the machine and the value of *labour-power* replaced by it' (Marx 1976a: 515, our emphasis).<sup>98</sup>

With this, Marx's presentation exhausts the novel determinations brought about by the system of machinery to the production process as they pertain to its 'objective factor'. What necessarily follows, then, is the investigation of the impact of these transformations on the 'subjective factor' of the labour process, i.e. on the worker.

In the third section of the chapter on large-scale industry, Marx firstly presents what he refers to as only 'some general effects' of the system of machinery on the worker, that is, those changes that can be discussed without developing the specific form in

---

<sup>98</sup> This specifically capitalist limit to the introduction of machinery thus not only evidences the *restricted* character of this alienated social form of development of the material productive forces of society vis-à-vis a classless, communist society (Marx 1976a: 515, fn. 16) - incidentally, a determination completely overlooked by bourgeois economists who, like Schumpeter and his contemporary disciples (Schumpeter 1934; 1947; Dosi, Freeman et al. 1988), make a great fuss about the technological dynamism of the capitalist mode of production. See Smith (2004) for a Marxist critique of Neo-Schumpeterian economics and Bellofiore (1985) for a comparison between Marx and Schumpeter. In addition, this also sheds light on the contradictory forms in which capital unfolds its nonetheless undeniable dynamism in the development of the productive powers of social labour. As Marx points out, the development of the system of machinery in some branches of industry may create such a surplus labour-force in others that capitalists could force down wages below the value of labour-power as a source of extra profit, thereby *hindering* the development of the productive forces in those sectors of production (Marx 1976a: 516). Finally, this also gives the 'exact demonstration' of the progressive character of the class struggle over the value of labour-power as an active force in the development of the productive forces of society and, therefore, in the production of the material conditions for its own determination as the form of the abolition of capital.

which the 'human material is incorporated with this objective organism' (Marx 1976a: 517). In other words, these are the effects whose development does not involve any new *qualitative* determination in the productive subjectivity of workers. Rather, they refer to the *quantitative* changes that machinery brings about in capital's valorisation process as a process of exploitation of the worker. These include: the quantitative extension of the mass of exploitable labour-power through the incorporation of female and child labour; the tendency to prolong the working day; and the tendency to increase the intensive magnitude of the exploitation of human labour.<sup>99</sup>

It is in section 4, through the presentation of the functioning of 'the factory as a whole', that Marx starts to unfold the specific qualitative determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry. The discussion of a passage from Ure serves Marx succinctly to identify the most general determination of the factory as the ambit of capitalist society where the conscious regulation of an immediately social production process takes place. A conscious regulation, however, that is determined as a concrete form of the *inverted* general social regulation as an attribute of the materialised social relation in its process of self-expansion. In the factory - and this is the issue that Ure's definition overlooks – this inverted social existence reaches a further stage in its development by acquiring a 'technical and palpable reality' (Marx 1976a: 548).

---

<sup>99</sup> As mentioned above, the discussion of these last two aspects completes the unfolding of the determinations of the material basis of the respective forces of the classes in struggle over the value of labour-power. Again, it shows that the political power of the working class springs from those necessities of the reproduction of social capital which clash with those simply realised through the indirect regulation of social labour and personified by the capitalists.



Thus, the scientific conscious regulation of social labour characterising large-scale industry is not an attribute borne by those workers performing direct labour in the immediate production process. For them, those powers exist already objectified in the system of machinery, to whose automatic movement they have to subordinate the exercise of their productive consciousness and will, to the point of becoming 'its living appendages' (Marx 1976a: 548). Large-scale industry consequently entails an enormous scientific development of the 'intellectual faculties of the production process' only by exacerbating their separation from manual labourers. In its mode of existence as a system of machinery, the product of labour comes to dominate the producer not only formally but even materially as well. Capital thus appears to manual workers as the *concrete material subject* of the production process itself.

As the personification of the system of machinery acting as a material mode of existence of capital, the capitalist represents before the direct labourers the consciousness of the unity of their productive co-operation. The conscious articulation of their directly social labour therefore appears as the product of the capitalist's autocratic will, which, given the increasing complexity and scale of the co-operative production process under his/her command, acquires an objective form in the factory code and its 'barrack-like discipline' (Marx 1976a: 549).

With all these elements, we can now turn to synthesise the specific determination of the productive subjectivity of the worker of large-scale industry. In - *tendentially* - doing away with the need for all specialised skill and knowledge from the workers, the production of relative surplus-value through the system of machinery gives the development of their productive subjectivity the concrete form of an *absolute*

*degradation*. In this brutal way, and in opposition to the *particularism* of the subjectivity of the wage-labourer of manufacture, large-scale industry begets, as its most genuine product, a *universal worker*, i.e. a productive subject capable of taking part in any form of the human labour process.<sup>100</sup> In the words of Marx,

Hence, in place of the hierarchy of specialised workers that characterizes manufacture, there appears, in the automatic factory, a tendency to equalize and reduce to an identical level every kind of work that has to be done by the minders of the machines; in place of the artificially produced distinctions between the specialized workers, it is natural differences of age and sex that predominate (Marx 1976a: 545).

With this tendency to the production of workers who are capable of working with any machine, the material or technical necessity for the life-long attachment of individuals to a single productive function disappears. However, the exploitative relation between capitalists and workers that mediates the development of the material productive forces of social labour as an alienated attribute of its product, leads to the

---

<sup>100</sup> For post-modern social thought, any claim that there is something progressive in capital's tendency to produce universal subjectivities can only represent a totalitarian attack by the Western metaphysics of the subject aimed at suppressing the ontologically irreducible difference on which human subjectivity is predicated. In the same vein as Adam Smith could not distinguish labour from alienated labour and therefore saw the former as intrinsically a sacrifice, post-modern social thought cannot distinguish the progressive nature of the development of the universality of human subjectivity as such from the alienated capitalist form in which the conditions for its realisation are historically achieved, i.e. from the alienated universality of the determination of human beings as *personifications*. See Goldner (2001: 91-7).



reproduction of the 'old division of labour' in even more hideous fashion. Large-scale industry's tendency to produce an increasingly universal worker is thereby realised in the concrete form of its negation, that is, by multiplying the spaces for the exploitation of living labour on the basis of an exacerbation of 'ossified particularities'. Thus, the individual capitalist could not care less about the disappearance of the technical necessity for a particularistic development of the worker's productive subjectivity. Under the pressure of competition, his/her only individual motive is the production of an extra surplus-value. If he/she can obtain it by attaching the worker to 'the lifelong speciality of serving the same machine' (Marx 1976a: 547), so he/she will. And, in effect, the reproduction of the division of labour under the new technical conditions implies that a lower value of labour-power can be paid - since 'the expenses necessary for his [the workers, GS] reproduction' are 'considerably lessened' – and, in addition, that a greater docility on the part of the exploitable human material is induced - since 'his helpless dependence upon the factory as a whole, and therefore upon the capitalist, is rendered complete' (Marx 1976a: 547).

It is crucial at this juncture to be clear about this contradictory movement between universality and particularity of the determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry. Paraphrasing Marx, here, as everywhere else, we must distinguish between the general tendency of capital accumulation and the concrete forms in which the essence of the historical movement is realised. *Thus, the essential determination which, as we shall see, expresses the reason to be of the capitalist mode of production, lies in the tendency to universalise the productive attributes of wage-labourers.* This is the general movement of the production of relative surplus-value through the system of machinery which underlies - hence, gives unity to - the

variegated forms that the labour-process presents in the course of capitalist development.<sup>101</sup> In order to substantiate this, let us now move ahead in our reconstruction of Marx's investigation of large-scale industry to the point in *Capital* where he further unfolds the movement of the identified contradiction, i.e. to the subsequent discussion of factory legislation in section 9 of this same chapter.

Marx's exposition starts by reminding the reader of the already presented most general determination of factory legislation as the mode of existence of the *general* conscious regulation of social labour as an alienated potency of the accumulation of capital - that is, not simply pertaining to the conscious regulation of social labour *within* each private fragment of total social capital but to the establishment of the general conditions which must be presupposed by all of them. This puts us before what we have already seen in our discussion of the legal regulation of the duration of the working day by the capitalist state, namely: the way in which the autonomised movement of the private organisation of social labour through the valorisation of capital engenders the general direct regulation as its necessary product.

Factory legislation, that first conscious and methodical reaction of society against the spontaneously developed form of its production process, is, as we

---

<sup>101</sup> Again, this point can help us highlight the fundamental importance of the two-fold movement of the dialectical method (analytic and synthetic) underlying its power both to penetrate surface appearances of reality in order to discover the essence of social forms and to unfold the necessity of the concrete forms in which that essential moment is realised. Regarding the capitalist labour-process, the dialectical method can avoid the twin shortcomings present in the Marxist literature of both the one-sided empiricist focus on its more concrete forms - which substitutes a radical industrial sociology for a proper dialectical investigation (Burawoy 1979; Edwards 1979; Burawoy 1985) - and the speculative, unmediated imposition of the general determination on concrete forms which still involve its negation - as, we think, happens with, for instance, the 'immaterial labour' thesis popularised by Negri and Hardt's *Empire* (2000: 28-30), and originally coming from their and their colleagues' work around the journals *Futur Antérieur* and *Multitudes* (Lazzarato and Negri 1991; Lazzarato 1996). An empirical study informed by such an approach can be found in Corzani, Lazzarato et al. (Corzani, Lazzarato et al. 1996).



have seen, just as much the necessary product of large-scale industry as cotton yarn, self-actors and the electric telegraph (Marx 1976a: 610).

But if in its *material content* this determination of the production of relative surplus-value shows its progressive character as a form of development of the productive powers of social labour, its concrete realisation as state regulation - in turn, only imposed upon the immediate personifications of capital with the mediation of the class struggle - makes evident its limits springing from its *alienated form*. Hence, as Marx points out, the fact that factory acts cannot go beyond only meagre provisions 'strikingly demonstrates that the capitalist mode of production, by its very nature, excludes all rational improvement beyond a certain point' (Marx 1976a: 612).<sup>102</sup>

Be that as it may, the crucial point for our argument is that Marx's analysis of factory legislation completes (as far as *Capital* is concerned) the development of the specific determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry, which had left us, in section 4, with an unresolved contradiction between its general tendency for universality and the exacerbation of the particularism of the division of labour that, left to the unrestrained will of individual capitalists, it allowed. In addition, we shall see how this discussion leads Marx, for the first time in his dialectical exposition, to discover the revolutionary historical potentialities carried by this specifically capitalist form of human labour-power.

---

<sup>102</sup> The uncritical glorification of the advance in the state regulation of social production by 'state socialists' (whether in its reformist or 'revolutionary' guise) grasps the content of this process without being aware of its alienated form. The abstract critique of 'libertarian' communist currents, grasps the oppressive nature of the form but ignores that, in this way, a progressive content realises itself

The movement of 'the contradiction between the division of labour under manufacture and the essential character of large-scale industry' (Marx 1976a: 615) acquires a first expression in the establishment of compulsory elementary education for working children. As Marx points out, the unchecked exploitation of child labour by individual capitals led not only to the 'physical deterioration of children and young persons' (Marx 1976a: 520), but also to an artificially-produced intellectual degeneration, which transformed 'immature human beings into mere machines for the production of relative surplus-value' (Marx 1976a: 523). And since 'there is a very clear distinction between this and the state of natural ignorance in which the mind lies fallow without losing its capacity for development, its natural fertility' (Marx 1976a: 523), these excesses of the capitalist exploitation of child labour-power eventually reacted back on the very capacity of valorisation of total social capital by jeopardising the existence of the future generation of adult workers in the 'material and moral conditions' needed by capital accumulation itself. This is illustrated by Marx through a discussion of the case of the English letter-press printing trade, which, before the introduction of the printing machine, was organised around a system of apprenticeship in which workers 'went through a course of teaching till they were finished printers' and according to which 'to be able to read and write was for every one of them a requirement of their trade' (Marx 1976a: 615). With the introduction of printing machines, however, capitalists were allowed to hire children from 11 to 17 years of age, who 'in a great proportion cannot read' and 'are, as a rule, utter savages and very extraordinary creatures' (Marx 1976a: 615). These young workers were day after day attached to the simplest of tasks for very long hours until being 'discharged from the printing establishments' for having become 'too old for such children's work' (Marx 1976a: 615). Those then 17-year-old workers were left in such intellectual and



physical degradation that were unfitted to provide capital, *even in the same factory*, with the miserably restricted productive attributes that it required from its immediate source of surplus-value, i.e. human labour-power.

The education clauses of the factory legislation allow Marx not only to dispel any doubt about social capital's 'universal vocation' in its transformation of human productive subjectivity. They also serve him to highlight, for the first time in his whole dialectical exposition, that it is *only* the development of *that* specific form of human productive subjectivity that expresses capital's historic movement in the production of the material powers for its own supersession as the general social relation regulating human life.

As Robert Owen has shown us in detail, the germ of the education of the future is present in the factory system; this education will, in the case of every child over a given age, combine productive labour with instruction and gymnastics, not only as one of the methods of adding to the efficiency of production, but as the only method of producing fully developed human beings (Marx 1976a: 614).

Notice, however, that Marx makes clear that the education clauses represent the *germ* - and just that - of the 'education of the future'. To put it differently, Marx's discussion aims at showing *both* that the social forms of the future are effectively carried as a potentiality by the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry under consideration *and* that, with the determinations unfolded thus far, that potentiality is not immediate yet. On the contrary, in their 'paltriness', the education clauses reveal that these

determinations are far from being a 'method of producing fully developed human beings'. Rather, they are forms of positing individuals whose subjectivity is still trapped within the miserable material forms imposed by the reproduction of the conditions for capital's valorisation. Other material transformations are still needed to mediate the development of those germinal elements into their plenitude.

Social capital's necessity to produce universal workers is not exhausted by the obstacles to its valorisation posed by the division of labour within the workshop. As Marx remarks, 'what is true of the division of labour within the workshop under the system of manufacture is also true of the division of labour within society' (Marx 1976a: 615). In effect, inasmuch as the technical basis of large-scale industry is essentially revolutionary, it entails the permanent transformation of the material conditions of social labour and, therefore, of the forms of exertion of the productive subjectivity of individual workers and of their articulation as a directly collective productive body (Marx 1976a: 617). This continuous technical change thereby requires individuals who can work in the ever-renewed material forms of the production of relative surplus-value. 'Thus,' Marx concludes, 'large-scale industry, by its very nature, necessitates variation of labour, fluidity of functions, and mobility of the worker in all directions' (Marx 1976a: 617). However, he also points out again how the general organisation of social production through the valorisation of independent fragments of social capital negates the immediate realisation of this tendency for an all-sided development of individuals.<sup>103</sup> The private fragmentation of social labour, and its reified social mediation through the capital-form, permits the reproduction of 'the old division of labour with its ossified particularities' (Marx

---

<sup>103</sup> Bellofiore (1998) provides suggestive reflections on this question.



1976a: 617) and gives the imposition of variation of labour the form of 'an overpowering natural law, and with the blindly destructive action of a natural law that meets with obstacles everywhere' (Marx 1976a: 618). In this contradictory form, the realisation of large-scale industry's tendency to produce universal workers nonetheless marches forward, also revealing that it is in the full development of this determination that this alienated social form finds its own absolute limit. In other words, that it is in the fully-developed universal character of human productive subjectivity that the *material basis* for the new society rests.

This possibility of varying labour must become a general law of social production, and the existing relations must be adapted to permit its realization in practice (...) the partially developed individual, who is merely the bearer of one specialized social function, must be replaced by the totally developed individual, for whom the different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn (Marx 1976a: 618).

With this analysis Marx unfolds, then, another instance of the way in which the general necessities of the reproduction of social capital (in this case, workers bearing a universal productive subjectivity) enter into contradiction with its concrete realisation through the private actions of individual capitals (which strive for the perpetuation and exacerbation of the particularistic development of productive subjectivity). Moreover, we see once again how this contradiction moves by determining the working class as the personification of the mediated necessities of the valorisation of capital, the latter providing the material and social basis for proletarian political power. In effect, the development of large-scale industry makes the

possession of a universal subjectivity a matter of survival for the members of the working class since, as evidenced by the aforementioned case of the printing trade workers, only in that way can they be in a position to sell their labour-power to capital (thereby turning the alienated necessities of social capital into an immediate need for their social and material reproduction). Thus, workers have to 'put their heads together' again and, through their struggle as a class, force the capitalist state to 'proclaim that elementary education is a compulsory pre-condition for the employment of children' (Marx 1976a: 613). But what is elementary education if not a - certainly very basic - step in the formation of future *universal workers*? That is, in the development of productive attributes that equip the labourer to work not in this or that particular aspect of the immediately social labour-process of the collective labourer of large-scale industry, but in whatever task that capital requires from him/her?

Social capital's need for universal workers thereby provides another material basis for the political power of the working class in its confrontation with the capitalist class over the conditions of its social reproduction. In this first expression of that relation between large-scale industry and workers' power represented by the Factory Acts, the class struggle does not appear to transcend its most general determination as the form of the buying/selling of the commodity labour-power at its value. And yet Marx advances the proposition that, when concretely developed, that tendency towards universal productive subjectivity will eventually provide the class struggle with expanded transformative powers, namely, those necessary for the establishment of the workers' 'political supremacy' as a class.



Though the Factory Act, that first and meagre concession wrung from capital, is limited to combining elementary education with work in the factory, there can be no doubt that, with the inevitable conquest of political power by the working class, technological education, both theoretical and practical, will take its proper place in the schools of the workers (Marx 1976a: 619).

Now, the question immediately arises as to what are the more concrete determinations behind this inevitability of the proletarian conquest of political power. Unfortunately, no answer is given by Marx in these pages. In fact, we would like to argue that no answer could have been provided at all. The unfolding of the necessity of 'proletarian dictatorship' as a concrete social form involves still more mediations and, therefore, the former is not carried by the social form we are facing at this point of the exposition in the form of an *immediate potentiality* to be realised through the political action of the workers as a class. Thus, at this stage of the dialectical presentation, both this latter remark and the one discussed above regarding the totally-developed individual as the basis for the abolition of capital, cannot be but unmediated observations, external to the concrete determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry that we have before us. On the other hand, inasmuch as the latter *does involve a certain degree* of universality, a limited, albeit real, expression of the underlying tendency for the production of its fully-developed shape, Marx's reflections, although external, are undoubtedly pertinent. From a methodological point of view, he could therefore legitimately introduce those remarks in order to anticipate the direction that the further unfolding of this historically-specific contradiction of the capitalist mode of production - 'the only historical way in which it can be dissolved

and then reconstructed on a new basis' (Marx 1976a: 619) – should take.<sup>104</sup> But as a proper, complete dialectical account of the determinations underlying the proletarian conquest of political power or, above all, the revolutionary production of the free association of individuals, the presentation as thus far developed definitely falls short.

This, in itself, should not be problematic. According to the approach to the dialectical method we have been developing in this thesis, this juncture of our search for the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity is no dead-end at all. It only means that our journey from the abstract to the concrete still needs to proceed forward. Thus, as far as the dialectical critique of political economy as such is concerned, no anomaly lies before us. But very different is the question when approached not from the standpoint of the dialectical knowledge of revolutionary subjectivity as such, but from that of the elements for such an investigation we can find already objectified in Marx's *Capital*. In that respect, we think that the problem that the contemporary reader of *Capital* attempting to discover those determinations faces is, to put it briefly, that *they are not there*. Let us expand on this point.

We have seen how Marx, when faced with the tendential universality of the worker of large-scale industry and the growing conscious regulation of social labour it entails,

---

<sup>104</sup> In the same vein, Marx's comments on capital's *raison d'être* in the chapter on simple co-operation also bear this two-fold mark of externality and pertinence. The former because, unlike the condensed recapitulation of the general movement in the chapter on the 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation', the totality of the determinations behind the realisation of that world-historical role is not yet there. The latter because, as we have pointed out earlier in our argument, that certainly is the first time in the presentation that we can grasp an initial manifestation of the historical powers of private labour to take concrete form in their opposite: consciously organised, directly social labour.



*extrinsically* reflects upon the specific material form of productive subjectivity necessary to 'build society anew' on a really free basis. On the other hand, we have highlighted the methodological pertinence of such a reflection given that - as the passage on 'really free working' from the *Grundrisse* quoted above stated - the latter itself has as one of its determinations that of being a bearer of universal productive attributes, i.e. capable of 'material production of a general character'. So far so good. But, as the reader will remember, the attribute of universality did not exhaust the determinations of the form of *productive* subjectivity with the immediate potentiality for 'really free working' (which, as we argued, should provide the material foundation of revolutionary *political* subjectivity). In the first place, the latter also entailed a process of material production whose general social character was immediately posited. This condition is present - at least tendentially - in the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry as developed in *Capital* too.<sup>105</sup> But, in addition, note that Marx's passage from the *Grundrisse* mentions that the universality of 'revolutionary' productive subjectivity must be the expression of a *scientific* consciousness, capable of organising work as 'an activity regulating all the forces of nature'. And here lies the crux of the matter.

---

<sup>105</sup> In the chapter on 'Machinery and Large-Scale Industry', the tendency to expand the scope of the conscious regulation of the social character of labour co-exists with an opposite tendency to multiply the number of privately-mediated branches of the social division of labour, which is also the product of the movement of this form of production of relative surplus-value (Marx 1976a: 572). But no reason is given for one or the other tendency to prevail. This occurs later in Marx's presentation, when he unfolds the determinations of the 'General Law of Capitalist Accumulation'. There, the tendencies to the concentration and centralisation of capital show how the first tendency eventually imposes itself over the second.

Because although the productive subjectivity of the worker of large-scale industry as presented in *Capital* tends to become universal, this universality is not the product of the *scientific expansion* of his/her capacity consciously to regulate the production process, but of the increasing (eventually absolute) *deprivation* of all knowledge of the social and material determinations of the labour-process of which he/she is part. As we have seen above, for the workers engaged in the direct process of production, the separation of intellectual and manual labour reaches its plenitude. This kind of labourer can certainly work in any automated labour-process which capital puts before him/her, but not as the 'dominant subject' with 'the mechanical automaton as the object'. Rather, for those workers 'the automaton itself is the subject, and the workers are merely conscious organs, co-ordinated with the unconscious organs of the automaton, and together with the latter, subordinated to the central moving force' (Marx 1976a: 544-5). The scientific productive powers needed to regulate the forces of nature, and which are presupposed to their objectified existence in a system of machinery, are not an attribute that capital puts into the hands (or, rather, in the heads) of direct labourers. In brief, in the figure of this wage-labourer bearing what, following Iñigo Carrera (2003), we shall term an absolutely *degraded productive subjectivity*, scientific consciousness and universality do not go together but in opposition to one another. In other words, it is not this degraded productive subjectivity that, simply as such, carries in its immediacy the historical revolutionary powers that Marx himself considered necessary to make capital 'blow sky high'. Moreover, neither has Marx's exposition demonstrated that the very movement of the present-day alienated general social relation - capital accumulation - leads to the social necessity to transform, in the political form of a revolution, the productive



subjectivity of those labourers in the direction of their re-appropriation of the powers of scientific knowledge developed in this alienated form.

And yet despite this insufficiency as an account of the material genesis of the revolutionary subject, it is here that Marx's exposition in *Capital* about the determinations of human productive subjectivity as an alienated attribute of the product of labour comes to a halt. In the rest of Volume 1 (and the two remaining volumes), Marx no longer advances, in any systematic manner, in the unfolding of the material and social determinations of the revolutionary subject. From the point of the presentation reached, and after moving to the exteriority of the inner determinations of the production of surplus-value and to its reproduction, he just makes a gigantic leap into the conclusion contained in the chapter on the 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation', where Marx offers the following well-known account of the determinations leading to the abolition of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>106</sup>

Along with the constant decrease in the number of capitalist magnates, who usurp and monopolize all the advantages of this process of transformation, the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but with this there also grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very

---

<sup>106</sup> Which, when taken by itself, can certainly lead to the most mechanistic of accounts of revolutionary subjectivity, very easy to codify into a dogma. The point is that the content of the chapter at stake merely *summarises* the general movement that Marx has been unfolding *throughout the whole of Volume 1 and, in particular, in the chapters on relative surplus-value and the general law of capitalist accumulation*. When seen in this light, it is obvious that the development of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity is a very complex (i.e. mediated) one indeed.

mechanism of the capitalist process of production. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production which has flourished alongside and under it. The centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. The integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated (Marx 1976a: 929).

If we leave aside the question of the misleading conflation between two different (and therefore analytically separable) 'moments' of the revolutionary action of the working class contained in this passage - namely, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of capital – the question remains as to whether the determinations developed by Marx in the previous chapters suffice to justify the transition to this excessively simplistic and all too general account of the way 'the capitalist integument



is burst asunder'.<sup>107</sup> Certainly, the tendency to the centralisation of capital discussed in

---

<sup>107</sup> Whatever the ambiguities of Marx's formulation in the passage from the chapter on the Historical Tendency of Capital Accumulation cited above, a cursory reading of his so-called 'political writings' makes evident that he was very clear about the 'unity-in-difference' between the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of capital. To begin with, this is synthesised in the political programme of the working class to be implemented through the revolutionary 'conquest of political supremacy' contained in the *Communist Manifesto*, whose *immediate* economic content unequivocally comes down to the absolute centralisation of capital in the form of state-property – hence the abolition of the bourgeoisie – and does not involve the abolition of the capitalist mode of production (Marx and Engels 1976b: 504-5). As Chattopadhyay competently shows (1992: 92-3), for Marx the revolutionary conquest of political power together with the expropriation of the bourgeoisie were the *necessary forms* in which to *start* the process of transformation of the capitalist mode of production into the free association of individuals. But, unlike the conception found in Lenin and orthodox Marxism generally, Marx was very clear that the political rule of the working class 'does not by itself signify the collective *appropriation by society*, and does not indicate the end of *capital*' (1992: 93). The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was for Marx a *period within the capitalist mode of production* – hence, not a non-capitalist transitional *society* – in which the latter was to be entirely revolutionised in every nook and cranny up to the point of fully preparing wage-workers for their self-emancipation – hence for their self-abolition as working class (1992: 93). This has several implications. First, during that period workers continue to be wage-labourers (the sale of labour-power to the 'single capital' for a wage still being the general indirect social relation regulating the reproduction of the worker's life). In the second place, no matter how radically democratic the self-government of the direct producers (and Marx thought it would be. See Draper 1974 for a textual analysis of this), they still confront the social determinations of their individual life activity as an objectified power of the product of social labour, whose autonomised movement of self-valorisation actually rules the production process of social life (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 26). As much as with workers' co-operatives within an individual fragment of social labour, self-government by wage-labourers is tantamount to the general self-management 'of the use of the means of production to *valorize their own labour*' (Marx 1991: 571, our emphasis). Thirdly, this means that, although taking place in the form of a revolution, the political action of the working class that conquers political supremacy and expropriates the bourgeoisie cannot be the product of a fully self-conscious



the chapter on the 'General Law of Capital Accumulation' does provide an exposition of the necessity behind the progressive socialisation of labour as an attribute of the capitalist form of private labour. But such an account stops short at the exteriority of the *quantitative determination* of the scope of consciously organised social labour without saying anything about the *qualitative transformations* of the productive subjectivity of the collective labourer that such an extension of the scale of the former

---

subjectivity - otherwise it would not continue to see the social determinations of human individuality as external to the latter and hence as objectively borne by the product of labour. In other words, this form of political subjectivity is not the one which expresses the historical necessity for the self-conscious transcendence of the capitalist mode of production and whose determinations our investigation has been searching for. It is only the expression of the clash of capital accumulation with the mediation of private property, i.e. of the need for capital to take the form of a directly collective property, the immediate 'form of social capital (capital of directly associated individuals) in contrast to private capital' (Marx 1991: 567). Even more so than the joint-stock companies mentioned by Marx in Volume 3 of *Capital*, 'this is the abolition of capital as private property within the confines of the capitalist mode of production itself' (Marx 1991: 567). And yet, given that the centralisation of capital is the most potent form for the production of relative surplus-value and, *a fortiori*, for the alienated historical movement toward the constitution of universal productive subjects, the conquest of political supremacy and the expropriation of the bourgeoisie becomes 'a necessary point of transition towards the transformation of capital back into the property of the producers' and 'towards the transformation of all functions formerly bound up with capital ownership in the reproduction process into simple functions of the associated producers, into social functions' (Marx 1991: 568). As we shall see below, the 'ultra-leftist' political programme for 'immediate communisation' (Aufheben Collective 2003; Théorie Communiste 2003; Aufheben Collective 2004) is absolutely right *as far as the content of the political action of the fully developed, self-conscious revolutionary subject is concerned*. It is wrong in thinking that such a form of subjectivity can emerge in the course of history without passing 'through long struggles, through a series of historic processes transforming circumstances and men' (Marx 1986: 335) and which can only come about as the result of the 'conquest of political supremacy'.



presuppose. Seen from that perspective, we think that the transition to revolutionary subjectivity contained in the passage is definitely unmediated. For how are those workers whose productive subjectivity has been emptied of almost all content to organise the allocation of the total labour-power of society in the form of a *self-conscious* collective potency, the latter being what the abolition of capital is all about? The growing 'misery, degradation, oppression and so on' certainly confront those labourers with particularly extreme *immediate* manifestations of the alienated mode of existence of their social being. Therefore, they could lead them to reinforce their collective resistance to capitalist exploitation by strengthening their relations of solidarity in the struggle over the value of labour-power. But, in themselves, those expressions of capitalist alienation have no way of transforming the class struggle from a form of the reproduction of that alienation into the form of its fully self-conscious transcendence.<sup>108</sup> As stated above, from a materialist perspective, the question does not boil down to the will radically to transform the world, but to the existence of the material powers to do so. As Marx puts it in the *Holy Family*, it is about an 'absolutely imperative *need*' determined as 'the practical expression of *necessity*' (Marx and Engels 1975: 37). The emergence of the social necessity underlying the historical constitution of the latter still involves the mediation of more revolutions in the materiality of the productive subjectivity of workers.

In this sense, we concur in general with those who claim that Marx's *Capital* is *incomplete*. However, this not in the sense that the dialectic of capital needs to be

---

<sup>108</sup> And for an action to be fully self-conscious means to be aware of its own determinations *in their totality*. Hence, however fierce, the particular resistance to immediate manifestations of alienated social life does not involve the necessity to grasp the latter beyond all appearance it presents.

complemented with that of class struggle (Shortall 1994) or with the political economy of wage-labour (Lebowitz 2003), as if those latter aspects were not an inner moment of the former itself. Rather, we think that it is the very 'dialectic of capital' and, more concretely, the contradictory movement of the production of relative surplus-value through the system of machinery, that is in need of completion. Without this further exploration into the development of human productive subjectivity as an alienated attribute of social capital, a gap is bound to remain between the 'dialectic of human labour' unfolded in the relevant chapters of *Capital* and the revolutionary conclusions at the end of Volume 1.

In the following section, we shall turn to outline Marx's presentation of the determinations of the system of machinery in the *Grundrisse*. We shall see that although the complete *systematic* unfolding of the missing determinations is not there either, the main *elements* for such a further investigation of revolutionary subjectivity can be extracted from that text.

### **The *Grundrisse* and the system of machinery: in search of the missing link in the social determinations of revolutionary subjectivity**

Before getting into the discussion of Marx's account of the system of machinery in the *Grundrisse*, and as a kind of entry point to the latter, let us return for a moment to our reconstruction of the determinations of large-scale industry as presented in *Capital*. More concretely, let us go back to the relation between science and the production process. We have seen how, although this form of production of relative surplus-value



entailed the general application of science as a productive force, the latter was not an attribute materially borne by those labourers engaged in direct labour in the immediate process of production. For them, that scientific knowledge took the form of an alien power already objectified in the machine. This is remarked by Marx in the *Grundrisse* as well.

The worker's activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite. The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself (Marx 1993: 693).

And yet as Marx puts it in the *Results of the Immediate Production Process*, those scientific powers ultimately are themselves the products of labour (Marx 1976d: 1055). Thus, although the *formal* subject of those powers - as happens with all the powers springing from the direct organisation of human co-operation - remains capital, the question immediately arises as to who is the *material* subject whose (alienated) *intellectual* labour develops the scientific capacities of the human species and organises their practical application in the immediate process of production. Having discarded manual labourers as such a productive subject, it would seem that the only alternative must be to turn our attention to the only remaining character present in the direct production process, namely, the capitalist. Is it him/her who personifies, through the development of his/her productive consciousness and will,

capital's need for the powers scientifically to control the movement of natural forces? The answer is given by Marx in a footnote to the chapter on 'Machinery and Large-Scale Industry' in *Capital*:

Science, generally speaking, costs the capitalist nothing, a fact that by no means prevents him from exploiting it. "Alien" science is incorporated by capital just as "alien" labour is. But "capitalist" appropriation and "personal" appropriation, whether of science or of material wealth, are totally different things. Dr. Ure himself deplores the gross ignorance of mechanical science which exists among his beloved machinery-exploiting manufacturers, and Liebig can tell us about the astounding ignorance of chemistry displayed by English chemical manufacturers (Marx 1976a: 508).

Thus, it is not the capitalist who embodies the intellectual powers to develop the scientific knowledge presupposed by its objectified existence in a system of machinery. The science incorporated in the immediate production process is the result of the appropriation of the product of the intellectual labour of an 'other'. This 'other', whose productive activity the direct production process of large-scale industry carries as a necessary mediation, is not explicitly present in Marx's exposition in *Capital*. There might be two reasons for this exclusion. First, because in Marx's time such a social subject was only beginning to develop. And, secondly, because Marx's presentation in *Capital* is restricted to the transformations suffered by the productive subjectivity of those workers remaining in the direct production process. However, what his whole analysis implicitly suggests is that among the transformations that large-scale industry brings about is the extension of material unity comprising its total



labour-process outside the boundaries of the 'factory walls'.<sup>109</sup> Hence, the direct process of production becomes just an aspect of a broader labour-process which now entails two additional moments: the development of the power consciously to regulate in an objective and universal fashion the movement of natural forces - i.e. science - and the application of that capacity in the practical organisation of the automatic system of machinery and whatever remains of direct labour - the technological application of science, including the consciousness of the unity of productive co-operation. Certainly, these other moments are also present in *Capital* (Marx 1976a: 549). However, Marx's presentation there seems to revolve around the emphasis on their separated mode of existence vis-à-vis the subjectivity of direct labourers and which is presupposed by their activity. By contrast, in the *Grundrisse* he oscillates between such an angle on the question (Marx 1993: 693-4) and one which puts at the forefront the underlying material unity of the total activity of living labour, where the development of science and its technological applications act as essential constitutive moments.<sup>110</sup> With the system of machinery,

---

<sup>109</sup> In this analysis of the further determinations of the production process of large-scale industry we follow the approach developed in Iñigo Carrera (2003: 1-37).

<sup>110</sup> Dunayevskaya (1989: 80-86) correctly notes the difference in presentation between the account of the system of machinery in the *Grundrisse* – where the emancipatory potentialities of the system of machinery are considered - and the one in *Capital* – where its determination as a materialised expression of the domination of dead over living labour is emphasised. However, she wrongly attributes that to a change in Marx's view on the subject instead of as an account of *qualitatively different* potentialities engendered by the very same development of the system of machinery and personified by the different partial organs of the collective labourer.

(...) the entire production process appears as not subsumed under the direct skillfulness of the worker, but rather as the technological application of science. [It is,] hence, the tendency of capital to give production a scientific character; direct labour [is] reduced to a mere moment of this process (Marx 1993: 699).

The determinations presupposed by the production of relative surplus-value involve the specification of commodity-owners into capitalist and wage-labourer. Having discarded the former as the material subject of scientific labour, it is self-evident that only those determined as doubly-free individuals can personify the development of this moment of the production process of large-scale industry. Thus, although not explicitly addressed by Marx, the benefit of historical hindsight makes it very easy for us to recognise how social capital deals with its constant need for the development of the productive powers of science, namely: by engendering a special partial organ of the collective labourer whose function is to advance in the conscious control of the movement of natural forces and its objectification in the form of ever more complex automatic systems of machinery. Whilst the system of machinery entails the progressive deskilling of those workers performing what remains of direct labour - to the point of emptying their labour of any content other than the mechanistic repetition of extremely simple tasks – it also entails the tendential *expansion* of the productive subjectivity of the members of the intellectual organ of the collective labourer. Capital



requires from these workers ever more *complex* forms of labour.<sup>111</sup> As much as those discussed in *Capital*, these are also 'immediate effects of machine production on the worker.' Needless to say, inasmuch as this expanded productive subjectivity is nothing more than a concrete form of the production of relative surplus-value, the exercise of the newly developed intellectual productive powers is inverted into a mode of existence of capital in its movement of self-valorisation as well.<sup>112</sup>

In this alienated form, capital thereby produces a material transformation whose fundamental significance well exceeds the production of wage-labourers simply bearing different productive attributes. What is at stake here is, first and foremost, a radical substantial transformation of the very nature of human labour (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 11). The latter progressively ceases to consist in the direct application of

---

<sup>111</sup> Braverman's so-called 'deskilling' thesis (1998) is obviously a one-sided reduction of this *two-fold* movement of degradation/expansion of the productive subjectivity of the collective labourer required by the system of machinery to one of its moments (Iñigo Carrera 2003: 32). One of the immediate reasons behind such a unilateral account lies, as Tony Smith points out, in its very restricted definition of 'skill', very much referring to *manufacturing* skills (Smith 2000: 39). An early in-depth critical examination of Braverman's thesis can be found in Elger (1979). In fact, one could argue that both 'Fordist' and 'Post-Fordist' methods involve both deskilling and the enhancement of workers' 'skills'. On Fordism, see Clarke (1992). Clarke (1990) demolishes the fantasies of most of the literature on 'Post-Fordism', laying bare its purely ideological character. On 'lean production' see the work of Tony Smith just referred to above.

<sup>112</sup> That is, the productive powers of science take an alienated form not just vis-à-vis manual labourers, who face them already objectified in the system of machinery. Intellectual labourers also confront the development of science they themselves personify as an alien power borne by the product of their social labour. Moreover, we shall see in the next chapter that the alienated nature of this development of intellectual labour is even expressed in its general scientific form, i.e. its method.

labour-power onto the object of labour with the purpose of changing its form. It now increasingly becomes an activity aimed at the conscious control of the movement of natural forces in order to make *them* automatically act upon the object of labour and, in this way, effect its change of form. According to Marx's exposition of the system of machinery in the *Grundrisse*, *it is in the contradictory historical unfolding of this specific material transformation of human productive subjectivity that the key to the absolute limit to capital resides.*

To the degree that labour time -- the mere quantity of labour -- is posited by capital as the sole determinant element, to that degree does direct labour and its quantity disappear as the determinant principle of production -- of the creation of use values -- and is reduced both quantitatively, to a smaller proportion, and qualitatively, as an, of course, indispensable but subordinate moment, compared to general scientific labour, technological application of natural sciences, on one side, and to the general productive force arising from social combination [*Gliederung*] in total production on the other side -- a combination which appears as a natural fruit of social labour (although it is a historic product). *Capital thus works towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production* (Marx 1993: 700, our emphasis).



To put it briefly, the issue here is the old question of the relation between intellectual and manual labour.<sup>113</sup> More concretely, the fundamental point to grasp is the specifically capitalist form in which the antithetical movement of those two moments of living labour asserts itself with the development of the system of machinery. And the revolutionary aspect of this historically-specific transformation of living labour in capitalist society is that both the scale and complexity of the production process and, in particular, the increasingly scientific character of its organisation, make the subjectivity of the capitalist (the non-labourer) impotent to personify the now directly social labour under the rule of his/her capital. Which means, in other words, that the

---

<sup>113</sup> Sohn-Rethel's *Intellectual and Manual Labour* (1978) has become a *locus classicus* on this question. It certainly provides a good starting point, especially concerning the historicity of the forms of scientific thought. However, his idiosyncratic approach is not exempt from shortcomings. For a critical assessment of Sohn's Rethel work, see Kapferer (1980), Bahr (1980), and Reinfelder and Slater (1978). The main shortcoming of Sohn-Rethel's book correctly highlighted by these critical appraisals is its ambiguity on the question of the capital-determined nature of the very materiality of technological forms and the forms of science presupposed by them. In effect, despite all his emphasis on the historicity of what we have termed 'representational scientific thought', Sohn-Rethel actually attributes the latter full objective validity, albeit with 'false consciousness,' meaning by this lack of awareness of its own social existence and historical genesis (Kapferer 1980: 81). The transcendence of the capitalist mode of production therefore does not actually involve the transformation of the very forms of scientific knowledge and technology, but only their liberation from their blindness to their own social determinations as an inner moment of human labour. This is the result of the reunification of intellectual and manual labour. But if Sohn-Rethel ultimately failed to grasp the inherently capitalist nature of the very structure of modern science and technology, the critics referred to above fail to see the necessity of the transcendence of those forms of scientific thought as an immanent potentiality engendered by the historical movement of the capital-form itself, albeit one which expresses the necessity of its own annihilation.

development of the powers of intellectual labour and their exercise becomes an attribute of the 'labouring classes'.<sup>114</sup> As Marx states in the *Theories of Surplus-Value*:

*Concentration of capital (...)* It is in this extreme form of the contradiction and conflict that production – even though in alienated form – is transformed into social production (...) As *functionaries* of the process which at the same time accelerates this *social* production and thereby also the development of the productive forces, the capitalists become superfluous in the measure that they, on behalf of society, enjoy the usufruct and that they become overbearing as *owners* of this social wealth and *commanders* of social labour. Their position is similar to that of the feudal lords whose exactions in the measure that their *services* became superfluous with the rise of bourgeois society, became mere outdated and inappropriate privileges and who therefore rushed headlong to destruction (Marx 1972).

---

<sup>114</sup> The complexity and scale of the co-operation of the collective worker of large-scale industry render the subjective powers of the capitalist impotent to personify in the name of his/her capital even the unproductive labour of superintendence of the productive organs of the former. All the functions of supervision, coercion and management come to be personified by a partial organ of the collective labourer (Marx 1976a: 549; 1991: 510-11). The parasitic nature of the capitalist (though not yet of capital) thereby becomes increasingly concrete. Incidentally, the confusion over the parasitic nature of the capitalist and that of the capital-form underlies Negri's views of the present, 'Post-Fordist' forms of human co-operation as carrying in their immediacy – that is, without the mediation of more material transformations - the potentiality to explode the capital-relation (Negri 1992: 65-68; Negri and Guattari 1999: 156-60).



The scientifically-expanded productive subjectivity of intellectual labour is, by its own nature, increasingly general or universal. The exertion of this form of human labour-power aims at the expansion of the conscious control over the *totality* of the forces of nature. Moreover, this subordination of the latter to the powers of living labour involves the comprehension of their *general* determination in order to thereby develop their *particular* technological applications in ever-evolving systems of machinery. Thus, as Marx puts it in Volume 3 of *Capital* in order to highlight its specificity vis-à-vis co-operative labour, scientific labour is, by definition, universal labour (Marx 1991: 199)

With the constitution and permanent revolutionising of this organ of the collective labourer, capital thereby engenders *another* tendency for the production of workers bearing a universal productive subjectivity.<sup>115</sup> However, this universality is no longer the *abstract* universality deriving from the absolute *lack* of individual productive capacities to which direct labourers are condemned. When developed into its plenitude, it becomes the rich, concrete universality of organs of a collective subject who become increasingly able consciously to rule their life process by virtue of their capacity scientifically to organise the production process of any automatic system of machinery and, therefore, any form of social co-operation on the basis of large-scale industry. As the productive subjectivity of workers expands, it progressively ceases to

---

<sup>115</sup> A remarkable weakness of Postone's (1996) otherwise interesting analysis of the real subsumption lies in his implicit reduction of the working class of large-scale industry to direct manual labourers. Clearly, the *formal subject* of the development of science and technology is capital, as happens with all the productive powers of social labour springing from the direct co-operation of workers. However, the development of those productive powers has no *material subject* in Postone's account. That is why he cannot see that the potentiality for the abolition of capital is actually borne by the proletariat.

be the case that the worker's individuality vanishes 'as an infinitesimal quantity in the face of the science, the gigantic natural forces, and the mass of social labour embodied in the system of machinery' (Marx 1976a: 549). For the latter *are* the direct products of the objectification of their productive subjectivity.

Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are *organs of the human brain, created by the human hand*; the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process (Marx 1993: 706).

We saw how in *Capital* Marx focused on the 'negative side' of the effects of production of relative surplus-value through the system of machinery upon the material forms of the productive subjectivity of the working class. The historical emergence of the social necessity for the constitution of a 'fully-developed social individual' thus appeared as an abstract possibility, whose connection to capital's development of machine production seemed to be completely external. Conversely, we can appreciate now how in the *Grundrisse* Marx posits capital's relentless tendency to 'call to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social



combination and of social intercourse' (Marx 1993: 706) as necessarily engendering the historical becoming of that concrete universal subjectivity itself.

No longer does the worker insert a modified natural thing [*Naturgegenstand*] as middle link between the object [*Objekt*] and himself; rather, he inserts the process of nature, transformed into an industrial process, as a means between himself and inorganic nature, mastering it. He steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor. In this transformation, it is neither the direct human labour he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body -- it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth (Marx 1993: 705).

Moreover, and here in accordance with *Capital*, he presents the latter as the one whose further expansion eventually clashes with its alienated capitalist social form and, therefore, as the material form of productive subjectivity that carries as an immediate potentiality the necessity for the 'creation of the new society'. Hence, Marx continues,

The *theft of alien labour time, on which the present wealth is based*, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself (...) The *surplus labour of the mass* has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the *non-labour of the few*, for the

development of the general powers of the human head. With that, production based on exchange value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis (Marx 1993: 705-6).

It might seem that Marx is here substituting the intellectual labourer for the manual labourer as the revolutionary subject. However, the point is that the key does not consist in abstractly opposing intellectual and direct manual labour in order to privilege one over the other, but in grasping the contradictory forms in which capital historically develops these two necessary moments of the labour-process. Since Marx's exposition in the *Grundrisse* is only concerned with the *general* tendency and its historical result – i.e. with the movement of 'bourgeois society in the long view and as a whole' (Marx 1993: 712) – he does not pay much attention to the contradictory forms in which the latter asserts itself. However, it is clear that in the historical unfolding of the tendency for the progressive objectification of all direct application of human labour-power onto the object of labour as an attribute of the machine, capital actually *reproduces and exacerbates* the separation between intellectual and manual labour.

In effect, inasmuch as capital's conversion of the subjective expertise of the direct labourer into an objective power of the machine is not an instantaneous event but only done by degrees, every leap forward in the abolition of manual labour brought about by the revolution in the material forms of the process of production is realised by actually multiplying the spaces for the exploitation of manual living labour. In fact, the new technological forms themselves can generate as their own condition of existence the proliferation of a multitude of production processes still subject to the



manual intervention of the labourer, whether as an appendage of the machine, as a partial organ in a manufacturing division of labour or even in the form of domestic labour. Thus, until the conditions for the (nearly) total elimination of manual labour are produced, direct labour as an appendage of the machine and the division of labour of manufacture tend to be reproduced under the new conditions and with even more degraded forms of productive subjectivity and harsher conditions of capitalist exploitation.<sup>116</sup>

And yet it is certainly the case that this internal differentiation of the collective labourer on the basis of the respective forms of productive subjectivity is the self-negating form in which the *abolition* of that separation is realised in the historical

---

<sup>116</sup> This is illustrated by Marx in section 8 of the chapter on 'Machinery and Large-scale Industry' in *Capital*. There he shows how the production of relative surplus-value through the system of machinery reproduces modern manufacture, handicrafts and domestic industry. In this way, capital does not only revolutionise the determinations of the social existence of those workers incorporated into large-scale industry but also of those of the sections of the working class still working under the division of labour in manufacture or domestic industry. The latter forms of the social production process persist in their survival only through the imposition of the most brutal forms of the exploitation of the workers. However, Marx makes clear that the subsistence of manufacture and domestic industry is always provisional. The general tendency of capital is for the total development of large-scale industry. Moreover, Marx's discussion makes clear that the working class does not have to 'sit and wait' until the simple limit for the subsistence of manufacture is reached - a limit given by its relative productivity of labour vis-à-vis large-scale industry. Inasmuch as the struggle for the shortening of the working day succeeds in forcing its implementation in the branches of production where manufacture persists, it accelerates the development of large-scale industry by not allowing the selling of labour-power below its value and, therefore, by reducing the capitalist limit to the introduction of machinery. Here we have another instance of the way in which progressive politics mediates revolutionary politics, the former being the concrete form of the development of the material conditions for the emergence of the latter.

process. Thus, through the very exacerbation of their separation, capital tendentially abolishes the qualitative and quantitative weight of manual labour in the process of reproduction of social life, thereby converting the essential moment of living labour into an intellectual process. In this way, capital's transformation of the labour-process eventually reaches a point in which the separation between intellectual labour and what is now a quantitatively and qualitatively insignificant amount of manual labour, cannot materially obtain as a form of organising the life-process of humanity. The development of the material productive forces of society can only assert itself through the reunion of intellectual and manual labour in the individual subjectivity of every partial organ of the now directly social productive body, but with the former having the form of objective social knowledge (i.e. science), instead of being the product of the immediate subjective productive experience of the labourer (as in the case of independent handicraft production). As we shall see below, it is the consciously organised political action of the *whole* working class (whatever its productive subjectivity) that is the necessary form in which this latter material transformation is realised.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Besides, it goes without saying that, although the workers bearing an expanded productive subjectivity express the *movement towards* the development of an all-sided universal individuality, they do so within the limits of capital as an alienated social form. In other words, it is not the *immediacy* of the material forms of their productive subjectivity that constitutes the kind of 'rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity in its direct form has disappeared; because a historically created need has taken the place of the natural one' (Marx 1993: 325). As much as the workers with a degraded productive subjectivity, they not only have to change 'society' but also undergo a process of self-change in the course of the revolutionary process. Hence, *both* organs of the collective labourer have to 'get rid of the muck of ages' imposed by the



Be that as it may, the point is that in its formally boundless movement of self-valorisation, capital thereby cannot stop in the historical production of universal productive subjects. At the same time, this constant revolution in the material forms of human productive subjectivity can only take place through the progressive socialisation of private labour, thereby positing the extension of the scope of the conscious regulation of directly social labour as an immediate necessity for capital's production of relative surplus-value. Thus, through the development of large-scale industry, capital works towards the historical emergence of the other pre-condition for 'really free working' as well.

In the production process of large-scale industry (...) just as the conquest of the forces of nature by the social intellect is the precondition of the productive power of the means of labour as developed into the automatic process, on one side, so, on the other, is the labour of the individual in its direct presence posited as suspended individual, i.e. as social, labour. Thus the other basis of this *mode of production falls away* (Marx 1993: 709).

On the two-fold basis of the expansion of the scientific productive powers of the 'social intellect' and of the determination of human labour as directly social, capital moves right towards reaching its absolute historical limit as a social form. This limit is not reached when capital accumulation *ceases* to develop the material productive forces of society as, following Trotsky (Trotsky 2002: 1-2), orthodox Marxists would

---

determination of human subjectivity as a concrete form of the production of relative surplus-value.

More concretely, this entails the *transformation* of intellectual labour and its *generalisation*.

have it. Quite to the contrary, capital clashes with its limit when the very same alienated socialisation of labour through the production of relative surplus-value begets as *its own immanent necessity* the development of the productive forces of society in a particular material form, namely: the fully conscious organisation of social labour as the *general* social relation regulating the reproduction of human life. Under those circumstances, the further leap forward in the material productive forces of society - dictated by capital accumulation itself - comes into conflict with capitalist relations of production. Translated into our mode of expression, this classical Marxian insight can only mean the following. The alienated social necessity arises for the human being to be produced as a productive subject that is fully conscious of the social determinations of his/her individual powers and activity. Thus, he/she no longer sees society as an alien and hostile potency that dominates him/her. Instead, he/she experiences the materiality of social life (i.e. productive co-operation) as the necessary condition for the development of the plenitude of his/her individuality and therefore consciously recognises the social necessity of the expenditure of his/her labour power in organic association with the other producers. But this form of human subjectivity necessarily collides with a social form (capital) which produces human beings as *private and independent individuals* who consequently see their general social interdependence and its historical development as an alien and hostile power borne by the product of social labour. The determination of the material forms of the labour process as bearers of objectified social relations can no longer mediate the reproduction of human life. *Capital accumulation must therefore come to an end and give way to the free association of individuals.*



But with the suspension of the *immediate* character of living labour, as merely *individual*, or as general merely internally or merely externally, with the positing of the activity of individuals as immediately general or *social* activity, the objective moments of production are stripped of this form of alienation; they are thereby posited as property, as the organic social body within which the individuals reproduce themselves as individuals, but as social individuals. The conditions which allow them to exist in this way in the reproduction of their life, in their productive life's process, have been posited only by the historic economic process itself; both the objective and the subjective conditions, which are only the two distinct forms of the same conditions (Marx 1993: 832).

In brief, capital exhausts its reason to be in the historical process, thereby producing the social necessity of its abolition and, at the same time, revealing the material content pushing forward in that alienated form: *the self-production of the human individual as a working subject or the historical development of human productive subjectivity*.

As the system of bourgeois economy has developed for us only by degrees, so too its negation, which is its ultimate result. We are still concerned now with the direct production process. When we consider bourgeois society in the long view and as a whole, then the final result of the process of social production always appears as the society itself, i.e. the human being itself in its social relations. Everything that has a fixed form, such as the product etc., appears as merely a moment, a vanishing moment, in this movement. The direct

production process itself here appears only as a moment. The conditions and objectifications of the process are themselves equally moments of it, and its only subjects are the individuals, but individuals in mutual relationships, which they equally reproduce and produce anew. The constant process of their own movement, in which they renew themselves even as they renew the world of wealth they create (Marx 1993: 712).

We can appreciate now how Marx's analysis of the system of machinery in the *Grundrisse* provides the elements for the completion of the unfolding of the determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry that are missing in *Capital*. Moreover, we have attempted to show that these further mediations are crucial for the concretisation of what in the latter book appeared as an abstract possibility: the engendering of the material determinations – hence the social necessity - underlying the abolition of capital itself. Still, the exposition in the *Grundrisse* itself seems to be incomplete too. For, as the reader will recall, the point of this whole reconstruction was to uncover the determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class. More precisely, we have argued that this whole journey from the abstract forms of capitalist social existence to its more concrete determinations – the critique of political economy - was nothing more than the reproduction in thought of the necessity of revolutionary action.

And yet, if anything, the political action of the proletariat is noticeable for its *absence* in Marx's account of the dissolution of the capitalist mode of production in the *Grundrisse*. As Rovatti points out, the passages on the system of machinery are perfectly compatible with a fatalist objectivist or mechanical conception of the



**MISSING  
PAGES  
NOT  
AVAILABLE**

## Chapter 7. By way of a conclusion: further explorations into the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity

### Revolutionary subjectivity as alienated subjectivity

In order to reconstruct those *necessary* further mediations in the historical production of revolutionary subjectivity, which are absent from the *Grundrisse*, we need to bring back Marx's analysis of the class struggle as presented in *Capital*. For, as we have seen, there Marx uncovers two underlying determinations of the political action of the working class which, although pertaining to its role as a moment of capital's *reproduction*, are of fundamental importance for its specific determination as the necessary form of capital's *transcendence*. The first one already appeared in the determinations of the class struggle springing from the *formal* subsumption of labour to capital as discussed in chapter 5. There we discussed the determination of the political action of the working class as the necessary mediation, in the form of a consciously organised, collective social action, for the imposition of the *general* conscious regulation of social labour in the capitalist mode of production; that is, as a concrete form of the fundamentally *unconscious* – hence inverted - organisation of social life through the commodity-form. Furthermore, we showed in the previous chapter that the struggle of workers as a class was also the necessary form in which social capital's need for workers with an increasingly universal productive subjectivity, resulting from the movement of the *real* subsumption in the form of large-scale industry, asserted itself.



With those two determinations of the class struggle in mind, the answer to the question as to why the transcendence of capital can only be realised in the form of a proletarian political action follows quite simply. We have seen that, in its content, the communist transformation of social life precisely consists in the realisation of the plenitude of the two aforementioned determinations underlying capital's historic mission, namely: the production of the fully-developed universal productive subjects, in turn the necessary form of human *individuality* presupposed by the fully conscious organisation of *social* life as a directly collective potency. Thus, as the material subject whose productive subjectivity this historic-economic process transforms 'behind its back' in the direction of a fully developed and socialised universality, the working class thereby becomes determined to personify, through its revolutionary action, the *alienated* necessity of social capital to be superseded in the free association of individuals. Fundamental implications follow from this.

We mentioned when discussing commodity-fetishism that, behind the traditional Marxist view, rests the idea of revolutionary consciousness as the absolute opposite of the alienated consciousness, that is, as grounded in the abstractly free human subjectivity of the proletariat. By contrast, what follows from our approach is that revolutionary consciousness can only be a concrete form of the alienated consciousness itself. Let us elaborate on this. In the first place, this means that the necessity for revolutionary transformation springs from the movement of self-valorising value itself. More concretely, it is a concrete determination of capital's incessant drive to produce relative surplus-value. The crux of the matter is that it is a necessity of the production of relative surplus-value which can only take concrete

form through the abolition of the production of surplus-value (hence of capital) itself. In other words, that particular cycle of material reproduction of society is autonomously set into motion by the production of relative surplus-value. But the determinate form taken by the *material* transformation of the production process of human life necessitated at that stage by the former is the fully conscious organisation of human productive co-operation. Which, in turn, means that the *social* form of the life process of humanity must be revolutionised as well: it is a change of the materiality of the production process which, albeit needed by the valorisation of capital, can no longer proceed on the basis of that alienated social form. When read from the standpoint of the mature critique of political economy, the following oft-quoted passage from the *Holy Family* captures very well the gist of the matter:

Indeed private property drives itself in its economic movement towards its own dissolution, but only through a development which does not depend on it, which is unconscious and which takes place against the will of private property by the very nature of things, only inasmuch as it produces the proletariat as proletariat, poverty which is conscious of its spiritual and physical poverty, dehumanization which is conscious of its dehumanization, and therefore self-abolishing (...) Not in vain does it [the proletariat] go through the stern but steeling school of *labour*. It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do (Marx and Engels 1975: 36-7).



In this passage, Marx still seems to be within the boundaries of the kind of argument developed in the *Paris Manuscripts* where the revolutionary subjectivity of the workers seems to be grounded in a generic dialectic of the negation of the negation. Thus, in the proletariat all the inhumanity of private property is concentrated. Therefore, as that human incarnation of the complete negation of humanity, they are bound to revolt against those inhuman conditions. In turn, this revolt against inhuman conditions of life cannot but represent its negation and, therefore, the affirmation of humanity. It is this aspect which is generally emphasised within Marxism. Yet as our discussion of the limitations of that approach should make evident, it is not at that point that we have to focus. The key resides in the following points.

First, it is crucial to note how Marx uses the term 'compelled' to refer to the relation of the workers to their own revolutionary activity. We think that this shows how for Marx the alienated subject of that historical movement is capital (what he refers to as 'private property'). Hence, the revolutionary powers are not 'self-developed' by the workers but are an alienated attribute that capital puts into their own hands through the transformations of their productive subjectivity produced by the socialisation of private labour, in turn the concrete form of the production of relative surplus-value. This is the reason why *the revolutionary consciousness is itself a concrete form of the alienation of human powers as capital's powers*. The abolition of capital is not an abstractly free, self-determining political action, but one that the workers are *compelled* to do as personifications of the alienated laws of movement of capital itself. In this sense, when the workers consciously organise the revolutionary abolition of the capitalist mode of production, they do so not as the incarnation of the powers of an abstract human practice deprived of social determinations, but as personifications

of the inverted existence of the powers of social labour, i.e. capital. The point is that it is an alienated action that in the course of its own development liberates itself from all trace of its alienated existence. Through its political action, the working class now has the historically-developed *material* capacity to abolish the alienated social relation that determines it as such – capital – in order to affirm its productive powers as potencies of consciously (and hence, *concretely free*) associated human individuals.

Secondly, this leads us to the question of the specific *qualitative* content of revolutionary consciousness. We think that, as another aspect of their conception of revolutionary subjectivity as abstractly free, traditional Marxist accounts ultimately tend to pose the difference between revolutionary and non-revolutionary forms of consciousness in basically *quantitative terms*. In other words, the difference is referred to the quantitative scope of the struggle, i.e. whether it is aimed at partial aspects of capitalist society or at capitalist society 'as a whole'. So, revolutionary class consciousness is simply an extension of partial struggles based on that very same class identity constituted around the affirmation of an abstract human freedom against the (apparently) external coercion imposed by the capital-determined modes of social objectivity. But the point is that revolutionary political action is such because of the *qualitative* potentiality it embodies, and which resides in its being the form in which the fully conscious organisation of social life is historically-produced. In this specific determination, *it has to be a fully conscious action itself*. Thus, it is not just a question of struggling against capitalist society as a totality but of the determinate way in which the working class *consciously grasps* that totality as the way of organising its revolutionary activity. However general in its scope and fierce in its intensity, the political action of workers cannot be determined as revolutionary except when



grasping capital as a *concrete whole*, that is, in the totality of its social determinations. And this means, essentially, to comprehend the determinations of their own social being beyond any appearance presented by it. This does not only involve seeing through the transposed concrete forms of *objectivity* presented by the alienated consciousness in the capitalist mode of production, i.e. the value-form and its concrete development into capital. In addition, it also entails discovering the content behind the most general concrete form of subjectivity assumed by the alienated consciousness of the modern individual, namely, that of being abstractly free.<sup>119</sup> Thus, revolutionary workers must grasp the essentially alienated nature of their own subjectivity, that is, their existence as attributes of social capital, which has become the concrete social subject of modern society. But, in addition, this means discovering the material productive powers that, as social capital's mode of existence, they have developed in that inverted form. In this way, workers will discover the social necessity of the historical task that, as fully conscious yet *alienated* individuals they have to personify through their self-abolishing political action, namely: the revolutionary supersession of capital through the production of the communist organisation of social life.

---

<sup>119</sup> In *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács correctly grasped the necessity of this *form* of revolutionary consciousness. However, he failed to discover the essential *content* to be comprehended when social life is grasped as a concrete totality: not the free, self-determining action of the working

## Revolutionary subjectivity as productive subjectivity

In the traditional Marxist account of the revolutionary abolition of capital, the latter presupposes the development of two sets of clearly distinct necessary conditions: the 'objective' ones (generally associated with one aspect of the 'economic' laws of motion of capital such as its crisis-ridden character, the mechanical impossibility of economic reproduction, the tendency for the concentration and centralisation of capital, generalised barbaric conditions of human civilisation) and the 'subjective' one (class consciousness and organisation). The whole history of Marxism could be reconstructed on the basis of the ways in which the different currents emphasised one or the other factor or, alternatively, tried to combine the objective and subjective moments. But what unites most approaches and, we think, what dooms their attempt at discovering the concrete determinations of revolutionary action to failure, is the complete independence they posit between the *political* consciousness of the working class and the development of the materiality of the production process of human life. Because even when the need for material conditions is emphasised, the problem is that the particular condition or set of conditions generally posited as *objectively* grounding the necessity for the abolition of capital (be it a fatal economic crisis or the monopolisation of the property of capital simply as such) has no connection whatsoever with the political subjectivity of the working class. The latter is seen as developing according to its own different 'logic', generally deriving from the determinations of the *formal* subsumption of labour to capital and, hence, irrespective to the material transformations of social life. To put it differently, those approaches do

---

class as the identical subject-object of history, but social capital as alienated historical subject of modern society, the proletariat being its revolutionary mode of existence (see Starosta 2003).



not actually pose an inner *material determination* or necessity for the development of the revolutionary *political consciousness* of the working class. As pointed out before, they just provide an objective *context* which is seen as spurring, accelerating or facilitating the *self-determining* movement of the subjective factor which 'reacts' to the former. But there is no real mediation between the materiality of social life and the political consciousness of workers. It is this mediation that our approach attempts to provide.<sup>120</sup>

As we have seen above, it is the historical necessity for the all-sided development of the universality of the productive attributes of the workers beyond its capitalist 'integument' - generated by the alienated movement of capital itself – that is realised in the concrete form of the communist revolution. In this sense, the material conditions for the abolition of capital are not *external* to the concrete individuality of workers. Rather, they essentially pertain to their *subjectivity* as working individuals, that is, to their subjective powers consciously to organise the transformation of the environment into a means for the reproduction of human life. It is only when those material determinations of the development of human productive subjectivity emerge in the course of history that the proletariat acquires the social powers necessary to abolish their alienated general social relation. Hence, what this line of thought suggests is that *the revolutionary political consciousness of the working class can only be a concrete expression of their productive consciousness.*

---

<sup>120</sup> Despite all the flaws in their approach, Hardt and Negri and his colleagues researching on the 'immaterial labour' thesis (see footnote 101 above) have at least the merit of trying to offer that material determination of political subjectivity. Postone (1978; 1996) also attempts to make that link. On Postone, see the editorial introduction to the symposium on *Time, Labor and Social Domination* in the journal *Historical Materialism* (Starosta 2004).

This has important broader ramifications for the nature of the revolutionary movement itself. Because overlooking that material determination of the political consciousness of the working class necessarily leads to conceiving of the revolutionary process in purely formal terms, that is, as a *mere* transformation of social forms. But what our approach suggests is that what the revolutionary movement realises (its content) is, fundamentally, the transformation of the materiality of the productive forces of the human individual and, *therefore*, of their social forms of organisation and development. In other words, it is about a *material* mutation of the production process of human life, which takes concrete shape through a *social* transformation which, in turn, expresses itself through a *political* action. Hence, this means, in the first place, that the revolution is not about the simple appropriation of the objectified form of the productive forces engendered by capital, although subjecting them to another form of social organisation. This is, broadly speaking, the standard classical Marxist understanding of the nature of the communist revolution (starting with Lenin's socialist use of so-called 'Taylorism' to which we referred above, but also including the Council Communist reduction of the communist programme to the demand to 'get rid of the bosses', i.e. self-management of existing material forms of the production process).<sup>121</sup> However, this also means going beyond the well-known 'Western Marxist' correction, consisting in adding that the transformation of the social forms of human activity needs to be complemented by the development of an alternative 'socialist technology,' which would replace the existing

---

<sup>121</sup> The formalism entailed by the Council Communist ideology of self-management has been insightfully highlighted many years ago by some currents of the so-called 'Neo-Bordigist Ultra-Left' in France (Négation 1973; Barrot and Martin 1974).



forms of the material conditions of social labour that have been ‘moulded’ by the needs of capital (Dyer-Witheford 2000: chapter 3 for a review of the Marxist approaches to ‘technology-as-domination’; Arthur 2003c; Murray 2004). In this alternative version, the external relation between material forms of the life-process and social relations still persists. On the one hand, we have social relations. On the other, we have the materiality of the productive forces of the human individual. Since the former have moulded the latter, the construction of a socialist society requires that both are transformed, as if it were possible to do one thing without doing the other. So conceived, the transformation of the material forms of the production process is once again reduced to an external objective condition instead of being grasped as the immanent content of the communist revolution itself.<sup>122</sup>

In a nutshell, it is not a about an external leap from capitalism to communism involving, on the one hand, the revolutionary abolition of capital and, on the other, the construction of a communist society, as if they were different things.<sup>123</sup> Hence, it is not that the historical powers of the capital-form to develop the forces of production are exhausted and comes to a halt, then comes a social revolution which changes the social forms of the life-process of humanity, in order to then set into motion the productive forces again, but now on a new social basis. Rather, as a political action, working class revolution *is* the conscious organisation of that material transformation

---

<sup>122</sup> When not reduced when not reduced to an ethical question, part of a ‘moral theory of human perfectibility’ (Murray 2003). See also Gould (1978), who finds in Marx’s *Grundrisse* a critique of the injustices of capitalism and sees the development of the fully developed social individual, hence the emergence in history of human freedom, as the realisation of justice.

<sup>123</sup> Needless to say, the need for a ‘society of transition’, very different from a *period* of transition within the capitalist mode of production, has no place in our account.

of the productive forces of the human individual through the change in the social forms of their organisation. Only because of this does the revolutionary process transform both 'circumstances and human activity', i.e. involves 'self-change', as the third Thesis on Feuerbach claims (Marx 1976e: 4).<sup>124</sup> This, we think, is also the

---

<sup>124</sup> This determination of revolutionary practice as a process involving self-transformation has been rightly emphasised by various authors (Geras 1989; Barker 1995; Smith n/d), who thereby provide a necessary warning against the uncritical glorification of existing forms of working class subjectivity as immediately 'fit to found society anew'. However, we think that, in most cases, this process of 'getting rid of the muck of ages' through 'self-transforming' political practice, is seen in terms of the constitution of an abstract 'socialist culture of solidarity', with no reference to the materiality of the production process of human life. In other words, the question is idealistically seen as 'ethical' or 'cultural' but not fundamentally in terms of *productive subjectivity*. Lebowitz (2003) does grasp the need to focus on the latter. However, he sees the question as a matter of two different, externally-related grounds for the development of the workers' revolutionary consciousness: on the one hand, the transformation of the materiality of the production process of human life and, on the other, the class struggle. By contrast, we are arguing that it is a question of the development of the materiality of human productive subjectivity taking concrete form through the revolutionary political action of workers. Mészáros (1995: 917-36) provides perhaps one of the most suggestive approaches in this respect, explicitly addressing the need for determinate *material mediations* as the ground for the development of 'communist consciousness on a mass scale' and seeing the revolutionary process as the political *form* in which that material *content* is realised. However, sticking to the immediate concrete form of fragmentation and division through which capital's tendency for the production of universal productive subjects is realised, he cannot see the social necessity for the material transformation at stake as the *immanent* product of the alienated movement of the production of relative surplus-value itself. The necessity of revolutionary subjectivity ultimately remains external to the general social relation presiding over the movement of modern society and is represented as consisting in the completion of a historic task that capital leaves unfinished. Again, revolution is seen as an external leap.



underlying meaning of Marx and Engels well-known passage from the *The German Ideology*,

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; the revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew (Marx and Engels 1976a: 52-3).

Hence the general determination of the communist revolution: to be the political form of the riddance of the 'muck of ages' engendered by the production of relative surplus-value, that is, of the historical production of the subjectivity of the 'rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself' (Marx 1993: 325).

## Revolutionary subjectivity as scientific subjectivity

If the simplest *content* of revolutionary consciousness entails the self-awareness about the workers' alienated subjectivity, the question immediately arises as to what is the specific *form* of consciousness capable of discovering the former. The answer to this question is self-evident in the very intellectual process we have been through in this thesis. In effect, inasmuch as the *critique of political economy* entails the reproduction in thought of the concrete unity of all the determinations of social existence implied in the social necessity for the abolition of capital, it becomes determined as *the self-consciousness of the working class of the social determinations of its own revolutionary action as an alienated subject*. An alienated subject, however, that has developed the material powers and historic task to put its own alienation (and hence its existence as working class) to an end. On the other hand, we have attempted to demonstrate throughout this thesis that the critique of political economy embodies such a transformative power only by virtue of its specific, *dialectical form*. In the first part of the thesis, this was just stated although not really demonstrated. If successful, our methodologically-minded reconstruction of Marx's dialectical critique of political economy, read as the dialectical unfolding of the determinations of capital leading to the social constitution of the revolutionary working class, should have substantiated that point.

But there was another fundamental claim, only tangentially touched upon in the thesis, whose justification remained incomplete. We are referring to the historical determinations behind the distinction we made between representational scientific thought or logical representation and dialectical knowledge. As argued before, whilst



the former is the mode of scientific knowledge determined as a form of capital's reproduction, the latter is the mode of scientific knowledge determined as the conscious organisation of the practical critique of the capitalist mode of production. However, a proper grounding of this distinction was not possible at that stage of the thesis. It is only now, once we have discussed the determinations of the production of relative surplus-value through the system of machinery, that we can address that question properly.

In effect, we have seen that it is the latter form of the material production process taken by capital's valorisation that calls into life the powers derived from the scientific regulation of natural and social processes. In this way, capital increasingly determines scientific knowledge as the general form of productive consciousness organising the life-process of society. Furthermore, we have seen that this also means that the productive consciousness regulating the labour-process ceases to be subordinated to the immediate subjective experience and attributes of the labourer. In other words, it becomes an objective consciousness. However, this is an objective consciousness which is not the expression of the 'development of human powers as an end in itself' (Marx 1991: 959). It is determined as a concrete form of the expanded reproduction of capital through the production of relative surplus-value. In other words, it is an objective consciousness bound to reproduce its essential determination as an alienated consciousness. As we have already shown, firstly in our discussion of commodity fetishism and later on when dealing with the relationship between class struggle and the valorisation of capital, it is by falling prey to the inverted appearance as free consciousness taken by alienated consciousness that human beings reproduce the social relations producing the latter. In this sense, the objective character of

scientific knowledge faces a limit which it cannot trespass without ceasing to be a concrete form of capital's perpetuation: it must be strictly developed in such a form that it does not discover its own specific determinations as an alienated consciousness beyond any appearance. Thus, whilst being scientific – hence objective – productive consciousness as an attribute of capital must remain impotent to fully penetrate the appearances presented by the real movement of social life and, therefore, cannot become *fully* objective. How to reconcile these two determinations?

We think that our discussion of the difference between dialectical cognition and logical representation in the first part of the thesis provides the key to the answer to this question. For, as we have seen, the very *form* of representational science (i.e., its *method*) condemns it to grasp the relations between real forms in their externality and, therefore, to stick to some inverted appearance presented by them. Moreover, in being impotent to reproduce the contradictory movement of the real by means of thought, this form of scientific knowledge leads to uncertainty about its own objectivity. It therefore has to seek the foundation for its own objectivity outside of itself, in the alleged general rules of correct thinking – logic – guiding the thinking activity of an abstract subject of knowledge. In other words, it is an objective knowledge ultimately resting on *subjective* foundations and which is therefore impotent ideally to reproduce the immanent movement of social and natural forms of the reality. Thus, we can now see the way in which the contradictory development of scientific knowledge within the boundaries of the reproduction of capital ‘finds room to move’, namely: it does so by taking the form of *representational science*. The historically-specific determinations of social existence (and hence of social consciousness) become therefore expressed in the very *form* of the process of scientific cognition of reality,



i.e. in its *method*. The mode of scientific cognition being a social form as any other, it must have a historical determination as well. Armed with that scientific consciousness, the political action of the working class becomes condemned to personify the need of capital to reproduce itself, instead of personifying the necessity to supersede itself into the free association of individuals.

Exactly the opposite line of reasoning applies to the form of consciousness that organises the action which, whilst alienated, in the course of its development transcends that very alienation. We are speaking of the 'communist consciousness,' the 'consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution' (Marx and Engels 1976a: 52) whose content, as we have seen, is the development of the 'control and conscious mastery of these powers' springing from 'the world-historical co-operation of individuals' (Marx and Engels 1976a: 51). This fully conscious organisation of the development of the social powers of the human being - 'the reality which communism creates' (Marx and Engels 1976a: 81) - presupposes that the latter ceases to see the determinations of his/her social existence as an external force existing independently of the individuality of his/her conscious practical activity upon nature. And this can only be the product of a form of consciousness which is fully *objective* in character and that can therefore recognise and organise the social determinations of human individuality.

The great historic quality of capital is to create this *surplus labour*, superfluous labour from the standpoint of mere use value, mere subsistence; and its historic destiny [*Bestimmung*] is fulfilled as soon as, on one side, there has been such a development of needs that surplus labour above and beyond

necessity has itself become a general need arising out of individual needs themselves—and, on the other side, when the severe discipline of capital, acting on succeeding generations [*Geschlechter*], has developed general industriousness as the general property of the new species [*Geschlecht*—and, finally, when the development of the productive powers of labour, which capital incessantly whips onward with its unlimited mania for wealth, and of the sole conditions in which this mania can be realized, have flourished to the stage where the possession and preservation of general wealth require a lesser labour time of society as a whole, and where *the labouring society relates scientifically to the process of its progressive reproduction*, its reproduction in a constantly greater abundance; hence where labour in which a human being does what a thing could do has ceased (Marx 1993: 325, our emphasis).

Thus, in the communist association not only will human activity take a mediated form but, as the social form of organisation of the universal development of ‘human powers as an end in itself’ through conscious co-operation, it will develop the social mediation of individual activity to new levels and forms. That is, the human process of metabolism will not return to the simplicity of pre-capitalist forms of social production but, quite to the contrary, it will achieve even more complex forms than the ones produced under the alienated rule of capital. For the fully developed social individual, the problem at stake will be the integration of his/her individual productive action into the activity of a collective body composed out of the universal and all-round co-operation of human beings. And consciousness being the way in which the social forms of the life-process express themselves in the human head, how can the regulation by means of thought of such a complex process of reproduction take the



form of a consciousness not involving mediation? Certainly, then, social relations will become 'transparent' under the free association of producers. However, this will not be the result of an *immediate* insight (cf. Cohen 1972), but of a scientific consciousness that passes through all the mediations involved in the fully conscious organisation of what will be a highly complex form of human activity. The necessity for a scientific comprehension of the social determinations of human life will not disappear under communism but will become the general form in which individuals organise their life-activities. Paraphrasing Marx, there is no royal road to the self-conscious organisation of directly social human practice! As he put it already as early as the *Paris Manuscripts*,

My *universal* consciousness is the *theoretical* form of that whose *living* form is the *real* community, society, where as at present *universal* consciousness is an abstraction from real life and as such in hostile opposition to it. Hence the *activity* of my universal consciousness – as activity – is my *theoretical* existence as a social being (Marx 1992b: 350).

Whilst *necessarily scientific*, 'communist consciousness' must acquire a form which allows it to penetrate all inverted appearances presented by social being in order to discover its own alienated nature. We already know what this form is, namely: dialectical knowledge. Only the latter, as 'the reproduction of the concrete by means of thought,' ideally expresses the material power to organise the communist abolition of capital. Hence, whilst *logical representation is determined as the scientific method determined as a form of capital's reproduction, dialectical knowledge is the mode of scientific cognition determined as the form of capital's transcendence and, a fortiori,*

*of the free association of individuals ('the reality that communism creates')*. In brief, it is not just a question of abolishing the separation between intellectual and manual labour through the reduction of the latter to 'quantitative and qualitative insignificance', but, fundamentally, of the revolution in the very general form of scientific intellectual labour itself.<sup>125</sup>

### **Revolutionary subjectivity as consciously self-organised subjectivity**

The rejection of the need for (dialectical) theory to achieve the transformation of the capitalist mode of production into the free association of individuals has generally come from the abstract critique of Leninist 'vanguardism and substitutionsm' by so-called libertarian currents of Marxism.<sup>126</sup> Holloway's recent work is a case in point. For him, the postulation of the need for a scientific organisation of communist revolutionary activity can only lead to the separation between an intellectual elite and

---

<sup>125</sup> Inasmuch as it is determined to emerge for the first time in the course of history in the alienated form of the conscious organisation of the abolition of capital, dialectical knowledge initially takes the concrete form of *critique of political economy*. Once liberated from its existence as an alienated attribute of capital existing in the heads of the self-abolishing proletarians, dialectical social science does not wither away but must acquire a new concrete form: *human* natural science or the *natural science of man* (Marx 1992b: 356).

<sup>126</sup> This rejection is a particular expression of a more generalised 'cultural mood' in the present times of general political retreat of the working-class. In the realm of theory, this mood is expressed in the emergence of post-modernism as the dominant ideological form taken by social theory. In the realm of practical politics, this acquires expression in the anti-intellectualism characterising the current 'anti-globalisation' movement (for concise suggestive reflections on this, see Aufheben 1992: 1-2).



the masses. In turn, this would mean that the revolution ceases to be the self-emancipation of the working class and becomes the changing of society by the self-proclaimed vanguard on behalf of the working class (Holloway 2002b: 30).

Clearly, Holloway is not arguing for a complete refusal of the need for critical theory. He explicitly acknowledges that 'intellectual work is part of that struggle' (Holloway 2002b: 63). However, afraid that this claim could lead him to intellectual elitism, he then hastens to add that, although another expression of the class struggle, revolutionary thought does not enjoy any 'privileged role' in the practical critique of capital. The fully developed consciousness of the social determinations of alienated human activity is just another form, co-existing alongside social struggles based on immediate consciousness, of the critique of alienated labour. Or, in Holloway's own words, theory is simply 'a peculiar way of articulating our [the theorists'] participation in the conflict in which all participate' (Holloway 2002b: 30). The real, material unity of theory and practice to be achieved by the critical-revolutionary activity of the proletariat thus dissolves into the purely formal unity consisting in the co-existence of 'critique in theory' and 'critique in practice'.

By contrast, we think that when its concrete determinations are properly grasped, far from leading to a Leninist separation between 'party direction'/'intellectuals' and 'masses', the scientific organisation of political action actually constitutes its only genuine practical critique. In effect, the general material content of the conscious revolutionary action of the proletariat suffices to understand why it can definitely *not* take the form of the institutionalisation of the separation of the conscious organisation of that action from its execution proper. And this is not just a matter of an abstract

moral superiority of radically democratic forms of social organisation over hierarchical ones. This is but a consequence of the materiality of the social transformation at stake, namely, the production of the consciousness about the social character of human transformative action as the general social relation reproducing human life. In other words, this is the consequence of the necessary conscious nature of such a collective process of social transformation, which can only be such precisely for being the organic unity of the conscious transformative practice of each individual. Only in this way can such action acquire the plenitude of its transformative powers.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> The reduction of the communist transformation to a question of radical democracy has been a longstanding characteristic of the anti-Stalinist left and gained new life in recent times within the so-called anti-globalisation movement. This 'obsession' with democracy is an evidently understandable but *abstract* reaction of the revolutionary left to the bureaucratic experience of the Soviet Union (and also of Social Democracy in Western Europe). The critique of this 'formalist consciousness' with its 'fetishism of organisational forms' has also been one of the themes insightfully developed by the 'Neo-Bordigist' ultra-left in France (Barrot and Martin 1974). As Goldner notes, the critique of capital from the perspective of radical democracy basically follows from the representation of capital as essentially a *hierarchical relation of power* (Goldner 1981). But as value-in-process, capital is a materialised form of social mediation that becomes the self-moving subject of human life, a determination which derives from the essentially unconscious form of social reproduction through the commodity-form. Hence, the content of the communist transformation is not the democratisation of society but the abolition of the determination of the human life-process as the material bearer of the self-expansion of capital through the conscious association of the fully developed social individuals. Inasmuch as its production involves the conscious organisation of collective human practice as an attribute borne by each human individual, one could call that 'democratic'. But without a critique of the commodity-form, money-form, capital-form and the abstractly free subjectivity of the private individual, the call for radical democracy mystifies rather than throws light on the communist revolution.



Thus, the monopoly over the conscious organisation of the general social character of human action by some individuals (let us say, the 'intelligentsia') can signal just one thing. Namely, that the rest of the members of society are acting *unconsciously*, uncritically accepting the appearance that the would-be leaders really are acting consciously, no matter how democratic the mediations between those two poles, or how much the leaders are predisposed to 'learn' from the spontaneous movement of the masses.<sup>128</sup> When Marx spoke of communism as the conscious association of individuals, he really meant it. And this is not just a matter of 'feeling like' associating with others or of instinctively doing it under the pressure of external circumstances (even less a question of ethical duty), but of being fully aware of the social necessity of this association in the totality of its determinations.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, this is why the reproduction in thought of the social determinations of the political action that accomplishes the said transformation of the whole process of human metabolism (dialectics), must be by its very essence a collective class product whose production involves *all* individuals concerned. The development of science as the practical critique of capital thereby does not only involve the *transformation* of the mode of scientific cognition but also its *generalisation*. To put it simply, dialectical knowledge (hence, 'communist consciousness') must become an attribute borne by each member of the self-abolishing proletariat as whole, regardless of the particular form of productive subjectivity inherited from the different role played as partial organs of the

---

<sup>128</sup> See Shandro (1995), for an interesting but futile attempt to save Lenin's theory of the party.

<sup>129</sup> Thus it is in the very essence of dialectical knowledge to require the reproduction in thought of the social determinations of human purposeful activity in the singularity of each individual action. This is why, by its very form, dialectical cognition is inherently self-critical: in each occasion it is set into motion, it subjects to criticism its existing forms (Iñigo Carrera 1992). We shall return to this in the next section.

production and circulation of capital with which they enter the revolutionary process. Only in this way can the 'genuine bond of consciousness and action' (Lukács) be established in the course of human history, thereby making the material unity of theory and practice become the general social relation reproducing human life.

### **Final words: Whose revolutionary action is it anyway?**

The reader might be tempted to grasp what we have been doing in this thesis as an exercise in 'Marxology', yet another *interpretation* of the works of Karl Marx. However, the very form of the dialectical method as discussed in this work already provides us with a first reason as to why it cannot be seen as an interpretation of texts. As argued above, the point of departure of any materialist dialectical investigation must be the conscious organisation of the form to be given to *our* transformative action in order to realise with the latter the potentialities existing in our reality (the here and now) to 'change the world'. That is why we have been referring to this thesis as a *critical reconstruction* of Marx's work, a necessary moment of the broader question of the positive development of the critique of political economy, in turn, a concrete form of the conscious organisation of the practical abolition of capital.

In this sense, what should interest the contemporary reader of Marx's works is not 'what he really said' but the development of the objective knowledge of the social determinations of *contemporary* social forms of existence of capital and, fundamentally, of *our* political action among its concrete forms. As argued earlier, this process cannot be spared from the development of the laborious analytical journey from the concrete to the abstract and the subsequent synthetic return from the



abstract to the concrete. In this endeavour, the reading of Marx's works, i.e. of socially pre-existing objectifications of dialectical knowledge, can only serve to *enhance* the potency of our process of cognition. In effect, inasmuch as it is an original development from the *individual* point of view but a process of *re-cognition* as far as its *social* character is concerned, we can engage in the inquiry with the advantage of being able individually to appropriate already existing social powers of the 'general intellect', thereby giving our own process of self-knowledge increased agility and efficiency ('real economy of time', as Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*).

On the other hand, this necessity to *re-cognise* all the mediations involved in the forms of present-day social being is what gives the very form of dialectical cognition an intrinsically *self-critical* quality. Thus, in our presentation of the different forms of capital as the alienated subject of modern social life through the reconstruction of Marx's texts, we were both following the immanent necessity of those forms *and*, in the very same movement, providing a critique of his own discoveries. As we have seen, one of the critical results of our investigation has been the awareness of the incompleteness of the unfolding of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity in *Capital*. A huge gap exists between Marx's exposition of the transformations of the *materiality* of the productive subjectivity of the collective labourer and the *politically* revolutionary subjectivity outlined in the end of Volume 1 of that work. Although we did argue that the core elements for such a systematic dialectical presentation of the social necessity of revolutionary subjectivity could be found in the *Grundrisse*, it was necessary to put together those pieces - scattered in what at the end of the day is an unpublished manuscript - and integrate them as necessary mediations into the

reproduction in thought of the qualitative determinations of the real subsumption of labour to capital.

Furthermore, in this concluding chapter we tried to go beyond Marx in the specification of the determinations of the revolutionary subject. This we fundamentally did by explicitly addressing aspects of revolutionary subjectivity that, we think, are only implicit in Marx's work (although they certainly *are* there), namely: its alienated nature; its being a concrete expression of the historical transformations of productive subjectivity; the specific form of its essentially scientific character (hence the historicity of scientific method); and, finally, the *materiality* of its organisational form (the overcoming of the separation between 'conception' and 'execution' in the political action of the working class). In brief, we tried to advance in the positing of more concrete determinations of revolutionary subjectivity.

And yet even if including more concrete mediations than Marx, this thesis evidently still remained at a considerably high level of abstraction. As much as Marx himself, we also considered 'bourgeois society in the long view and as a whole' (Marx 1993: 712). That is, with the exception of some digressions in passing, we only addressed the *essential determination* and *general tendency* behind revolutionary subjectivity, with no attention to the concrete forms in which the latter unfolds in the course of the history of capitalist development and, more importantly, in the *contemporary* forms of the essentially global accumulation of capital. On the other hand, we believe that our approach does provide us with the key to such an investigation, namely: the movement of the two-fold contradiction between universality and particularity and



between expansion and degradation of the productive subjectivity of the different organs of the collective labourer, as it springs from the production of relative surplus-value. This, we think, is the most important implication for future research that our thesis opens up.

As a necessary moment of the class struggle, a most urgent task arises for that partial organ of the collective labourer responsible the production of the critical scientific knowledge of capitalist social forms (i.e., communist intellectual labourers). What is required is dialectical research on the present-day concrete forms in which the alienated development of the productive subjectivity of the workers towards its fully developed universality realises itself through its own negation; that is, by fragmenting the different partial organs of the collective labourer and by keeping the productive attributes of the labourers (even when they are expanded as in the case of intellectual labourers) miserably bound to being those required by the material forms of the production of relative surplus-value.

Needless to say, and at this stage of our investigation this might sound redundant, this does not entail an abstractly theoretical interest but is the necessary method for discovering the form of political action that could mediate the immediate needs of workers with the 'historical interests of the proletariat as a whole,' i.e. the development of the productive subjectivity of the global collective worker beyond its alienated capitalist form. In the 1840's, Marx and Engels put forward in the political programme of the *Communist Manifesto* the form of political action necessary to accelerate the process of social transformation: the revolutionary centralisation of social capital as the property of the national state. Thus they could argue that the

process of emancipation of the workers was global in substance but national in form (Marx and Engels 1976b). Yet it seems to us that in the era of the so-called 'globalisation' of capital the updating of that political programme should start by modifying that statement. Today the political action of the class must be international in both substance and form. The necessarily collective enterprise of discovering the adequate concrete political forms for contemporary proletarian internationalist action immanent in the present forms of the global accumulation of capital, constitutes an urgent and unavoidable task.



## Bibliography

- Aglietta, M. (1979). A Theory of Capitalist Regulation. London, New Left Book.
- Albritton, R. (1999). Dialectics and Deconstruction in Political Economy. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Albritton, R. (2003). Superseding Lukács: Towards a Contribution to the Theory of Subjectivity. New Dialectics and Political Economy. R. Albritton and J. Simoulidis. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Albritton, R. (2004). "Theorising Capital's Deep Structure and the Transformation of Capitalism." Historical Materialism 12(3): 73-92.
- Albritton, R. and J. Simoulidis, Eds. (2003). New Dialectics and Political Economy. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Althusser, L. (1969). For Marx. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Althusser, L. and É. Balibar (1968). Reading Capital. London, New Left Books.
- Arthur, C. J. (1986). Dialectics of Labour. Marx and his Relation to Hegel. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Arthur, C. J. (1993). Hegel's *Logic* and Marx's *Capital*. Marx's Method in Capital: A Reexamination. F. Moseley. Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Humanities Press.
- Arthur, C. J. (1996). Engels as Interpreter of Marx's Economics. Engels Today. A Centenary Appreciation. C. J. Arthur. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Arthur, C. J. (1997). Against the Logical-Historical Method: Dialectical Derivation versus Linear Logic. New Investigations of Marx's Method. F. Moseley and M. Campbell. Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Humanities Press.

- Arthur, C. J. (1998a). Engels, Logic and History. Marxian Economics: a Reappraisal. Essays on Volume III of *Capital*. R. Bellofiore. Basingstoke, Macmillan. 1.
- Arthur, C. J. (1998b). The Fluidity of Capital and the Logic of the Concept. The Circulation of Capital. Essays on Volume Two of Marx's *Capital*. C. J. Arthur and G. Reuten. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Arthur, C. J. (2001a). "The Spectral Ontology of Value." Radical Philosophy 107: 32-42.
- Arthur, C. J. (2001b). "Value, Labour and Negativity." Capital and Class 73(Spring): 15-39.
- Arthur, C. J. (2002a). Capital, Competition and Many Capitals. The Culmination of Capital. Essays on Volume III of Marx's *Capital*. M. Campbell and G. Reuten. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Arthur, C. J. (2002b). The New Dialectic and Marx's *Capital*. Lieden, Brill Academic Publishers.
- Arthur, C. J. (2003a). "The Hegel-Marx Connection." Historical Materialism 11(1): 179-83.
- Arthur, C. J. (2003b). "Once More on the Homology Thesis: A Response to Smith's Reply." Historical Materialism 11(1): 195-8.
- Arthur, C. J. (2003c). The Problem of Use-Value for a Dialectic of Capital. New Dialectics and Political Economy. R. Albritton and J. Simoulidis. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Arthur, C. J. (2004a). Money and the Form of Value. The Constitution of Capital. Essays on Volume I of Marx's *Capital*. R. Bellofiore and N. Taylor. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.



Arthur, C. J. (2004b). "Subject and Counter-Subject." Historical Materialism 12(3): 93-102.

Arthur, C. J. and G. Reuten, Eds. (1998). The Circulation of Capital. Basingstoke, Macmillan.

Aufheben, C. (1992). "Editorial." Aufheben 1: 1-2.

Aufheben Collective (1993). "A Contribution Towards a Critique of the Theory of Decadence. Part 1: The theory of decline or the decline of theory? [Electronic Version]." Aufheben 2. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from [http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/auf\\_2\\_dec.html](http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/auf_2_dec.html)

Aufheben Collective (1994). "Decadence: The Theory of Decline or the Decline of Theory? Part 2 [Electronic Version]." Aufheben 3. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from [http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/auf\\_3\\_dec2.html](http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/auf_3_dec2.html)

Aufheben Collective (1995). "Decadence: The Theory of Decline or the Decline of Theory? Part 3 [Electronic Version]." Aufheben 4. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from [http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/auf\\_4\\_dec3.html](http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/auf_4_dec3.html)

Aufheben Collective (2003). "Communist Theory - Beyond the Ultra-Left? An Introduction to Théorie Communiste [Electronic Version]." Aufheben 11. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from [http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/auf\\_11\\_tcreply.html#\[26\]](http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/auf_11_tcreply.html#[26])

Aufheben Collective (2004). "Communist Theory: Beyond the Ultra-Left. A Reply to TC." Aufheben 12: 36-49.

Avineri, S. (1993). The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Bahr, H.-D. (1980). The Class Structure of Machinery: Notes on the Value Form. Outline of a Critique of Techonology. P. Slater. London, Ink Links.

- Balibar, É. (1968). The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism. Reading 'Capital'. London, New Left Books.
- Banaji, J. (1979). From the Commodity to Capital: Hegel's Dialectic in Marx's *Capital*. Value. The Representation of Labour in Capitalism. D. Elson. London, CSE Books.
- Barker, C. (1995). "'The Muck of Ages': Reflections on Proletarian Self-Emancipation." Studies in Marxism 2: 81-112.
- Barrot, J. and F. Martin (1974). Eclipse and the Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement. Detroit, Black and Red.
- Bellofiore, R. (1985). "Marx after Schumpeter." Capital and Class 24(Winter): 60-74.
- Bellofiore, R. (1998). "The Concept of Labor in Marx." International Journal of Political Economy 28(3): 4-34.
- Bellofiore, R. and R. Finelli (1998). Capital, Labour and Time: The Marxian Monetary Theory of Value as a Theory of Exploitation. Marxian Economics. A Reappraisal. R. Bellofiore. 1. Essays on Volume III of *Capital*. Method, Value and Money.
- Bellofiore, R. and N. Taylor, Eds. (2004). The Constitution of Capital. Essays on Volume I of Capital. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bensaïd, D. (2002). Marx for Our Times. London, Verso.
- Blanke, B., U. Jürgens, et al. (1978). On the Current Marxist Discussion on the Analysis of Form and Function of the Bourgeois State. Reflections on the Relationship of Politics to Economics. State and Capital. A Marxist Debate. J. Holloway and S. Picciotto. London, Edward Arnold.



- Boehm-Bawerk, E. v. (1975). Karl Marx and the Close of His System. London, Merlin Press.
- Bonefeld, W. (1993). The Recomposition of the British State During the 1980s. Aldershot, Dartmouth.
- Bonefeld, W. (1995). Capital as Subject and the Existence of Labour. Open Marxism. Volume 3: Emancipating Marx. W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn, J. Holloway and K. Psychopedis. London, Pluto Press.
- Bonefeld, W. (2004). "On Postone's Courageous but Unsuccessful Attempt to Banish the Class Antagonism from the Critique of Political Economy." Historical Materialism 12(3): 103-124.
- Bonefeld, W. and J. Holloway, Eds. (1991). Post-Fordism and Social Form. A Marxist Debate on the Post-Fordist State. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Boyer, R. (1990). The Regulation School: A Critical Introduction. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Braverman, H. (1998). Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century. New York, Monthly Review.
- Brighton Labour Process Group (1977). "The Capitalist Labour Process." Capital and Class 1(Summer): 3-26.
- Burawoy, M. (1979). Manufacturing Consent. Changes in the labour process under Monopoly Capitalism. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Burawoy, M. (1985). The Politics of Production. London, Verso.
- Campbell, M. and G. Reuten, Eds. (2002). The Culmination of Capital. Essays on Volume III of Marx's Capital. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chattopadhyay, P. (1992). "The Economic Content of Socialism. Marx vs. Lenin." Review of Radical Political Economics 24(3 & 4): 90-110.

- Chattopadhyay, P. (1996). "Capitalism as Socialism in the Early Soviet Doctrine: Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin and Preobrazhensky." Review of Radical Political Economics 28(3): 74-82.
- Clarke, S. (1980). Althusserian Marxism. One-Dimensional Marxism. S. Clarke, V. Jeleniewski Seidler, K. McDonnell, K. Robins and T. Lovell. London and New York, Allison & Busby.
- Clarke, S. (1988). Keynesianism, Monetarism and the Crisis of the State. Aldershot, Edward Elgar.
- Clarke, S. (1990). "New Utopias for Old: Fordist Dreams and Post-Fordist Fantasies." Capital and Class 42(Winter): 131-155.
- Clarke, S. (1991a). Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Clarke, S. (1991b). Overaccumulation, Class Struggle and the Regulation Approach. Post-Fordism and Social Form. A Marxist Debate on the Post-Fordist State. W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Clarke, S., Ed. (1991c). The State Debate. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Clarke, S. (1992). What in the F---'s Name is Fordism? Fordism and flexibility : divisions and change. G. N. Gilbert, R. Burrows and A. Pollert. London, Macmillan.
- Clarke, S. (1994). Marx's Theory of Crisis. New York, St. Martin's.
- Clarke, S. (1998). "Was Lenin a Marxist? The Populist Roots of Marxism-Leninism." Historical Materialism 3(Winter): 3-27.
- Cleaver, H. (1979). Reading Capital Politically. Brighton, Harvester Press.



- Cleaver, H. (1982). Technology as Political Weaponry. Science, Politics, and the Agricultural Revolution in Asia. R. S. Anderson, P. R. Brass, E. Levy and B. M. Morrison. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press.
- Cleaver, H. (1992). The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: From Valorisation to Self-Valorisation. Open Marxism. Volume II: Theory and Practice. W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn and K. Psychopedis. London, Pluto Press.
- Cohen, G. A. (1972). "Karl Marx and the Withering Away of Social Science." Philosophy and Public Affairs 1(2 (Winter)): 182-203.
- Colletti, L. (1973). Marxism and Hegel. London, New Left Books.
- Colletti, L. (1992). Introduction. Karl Marx. Early Writings. Hamondsworth, Penguin.
- Corsani, A., M. Lazzarato, et al. (1996). Le Bassin the Travail Immatériel (BTI) dans la Métropole Parisienne. Paris, L'Harmattan.
- De Angelis, M. (1995). "Beyond the Technological and Social Paradigms : A political Reading of Abstract Labour as the Substance of Value." Capital and Class 57(Autumn): 107-134.
- De Angelis, M. (1996). "Social Relations, Commodity-Fetishism and Marx's Critique of Political Economy." Review of Radical Political Economics 28(1): 1-29.
- de Vroey, M. (1982). "On the Obsolescence of the Marxian Theory of value: A Critical Review." Capital and Class 17(Summer): 34-59.
- Dimoulis, D. and J. Milios (2004). "Commodity Fetishism vs. Capital Fetishism. Marxist Interpretations vis-à-vis Marx's Analyses in *Capital*." Historical Materialism 12(3): 3-42.

- Dinerstein, A. (2002). **Regaining Materiality: Unemployment and the Invisible Subjectivity of Labour.** The Labour Debate. A. Dinerstein and M. Neary. Aldershot, Ashgate.
- Dosi, G., C. Freeman, et al., Eds. (1988). Technical Change and Economic Theory. New York, Pinter Publishers.
- Draper, H. (1974). "Marx on Democratic Forms of Government." Socialist Register 1974: 101-124.
- Dunayevskaya, R. (1988). Marxism and Freedom. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Dunayevskaya, R. (1989). Filosofía y Revolución. De Hegel a Sartre y de Marx a Mao. Mexico, Siglo XXI.
- Dyer-Witheford, N. (2000). Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-technology Capitalism. Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press.
- Edwards, R. (1979). Contested Terrain. The transformation of the workplace in the twentieth century. London, Heinemann.
- Eldred, M. (1981). "Material Dialectics and Socialist Politics." Thesis Eleven 2: 40-61.
- Eldred, M. and M. Haldon (1981). "Reconstructing Value-form Analysis." Capital and Class 13(Spring).
- Elger, T. (1979). "Valorisation and "Deskilling": A Critique of Braverman." Capital and Class 7(Spring): 58-99.
- Elliot, J. E. (1979). "Continuity and change in the evolution of Marx's theory of alienation: from the *Manuscripts* through the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*." History of Political Economy 11(3): 317-62.



- Elson, D. (1979a). The Value Theory of Labour. Value. The Representation of Labour in Capitalism. D. Elson. London, CSE Books.
- Elson, D., Ed. (1979b). Value. The Representation of Labour in Capitalism. London, CSE Books.
- Engels, F. (1975). Anti-Düring. Buenos Aires, Editorial Cartago.
- Engels, F. (1980). La Contribución a la Crítica de la Economía Política de Karl Marx. Contribución a la Crítica de la Economía Política. K. Marx. Mexico, Siglo XXI: 333-343.
- Fine, B. (1975). "The Circulation of Capital, Ideology and Crisis." CSE Bulletin 12(October): XXXX.
- Fine, B. and A. Saad-Filho (2003). Marx's Capital. London, Pluto Press.
- Fine, R. (2001). Political Investigations. Hegel, Marx, Arendt. London, Routledge.
- Fine, R. (2002). Democracy and the Rule of Law. Marx's Critique of the Legal Form. Caldwell, N.J., The Blackburn Press.
- Fracchia, J. (1991). "Marx's Aufhebung of Philosophy and the Foundations of a Materialist Science of History." History and Theory 30(2): 153-179.
- Fraser, I. (1998). Hegel and Marx. The Concept of Need. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.
- Gaete, A. (1995). La Lógica de Hegel. Iniciación a su lectura. Buenos Aires, Edicial.
- Geras, N. (1989). Literature of Revolution. Delhi, Disha Publications.
- Goldner, L. (1981). The Remaking of the American Working Class: The Restructuring of Global Capital and the Recomposition of Class Terrain

[Electronic Version]. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from

<http://home.earthlink.net/%7Elrgoldner/remaking.html>.

Goldner, L. (2001). Vanguard of Retrogression. "Postmodern" Fictions as Ideology in the Era of Fictitious Capital. New York, Queequeg Publications.

Gorz, A. (1976). Preface. The division of labour : the labour process and class-struggle in modern capitalism. A. Gorz. Hassocks, Harvester Press.

Gorz, A. (1982). Farewell to the Working Class. An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism. London, Pluto Press.

Gould, C. C. (1978). Marx's Social Ontology. Individuality and Community in Marx's Theory of Social Reality. Cambridge, MA., MIT Press.

Grupo de Propaganda Marxista (2000). La Teoría del Valor y el Método en la Ciencia Social. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from GPM Web site: <http://on.to/gpm>.

Gunn, R. (1989). "Marxism and Philosophy: a Critique of Critical Realism." Capital and Class 37(Spring): 87-116.

Gunn, R. (1992). Against Historical Materialism: Marxism as a First-Order Discourse. Open Marxism. Volume II: Theory and Practice. W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn and K. Psychopedis. London, Pluto Press.

Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000). Empire. Cambridge, Ma., Harvard Univeristy Press.

Hegel, G. W. F. (1977). Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Hegel, G. W. F. (1991). The Encyclopaedia Logic. Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze. Indianapolis, Indiana, Hackett.



- Hegel, G. W. F. (1999). Hegel's Science of Logic. Amherst, NY, Humanity Books.
- Hindess, B. and P. Q. Hirst (1975). Precapitalist Modes of Production. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Hindess, B. and P. Q. Hirst (1977). Mode of Production and Social Formation. London, Macmillan.
- Holloway, J. (1991). Learning to bow: Post-Fordism and Techonological Determinism. Post-Fordism and Social Form. W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Holloway, J. (1992). Crisis, Fetishism, Class Composition. Open Marxism. Volume II: Theory and Practice. W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn and K. Psychopedis. London, Pluto Press.
- Holloway, J. (1995). From Scream of Refusal to Scream of Power: The Centrality of Work. Open Marxism. Volume 3: Emancipating Marx. W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn, J. Holloway and K. Psychopedis. London, Pluto Press.
- Holloway, J. (2002a). Change the World without Taking Power. The Meaning of Revolution Today. London, Pluto Press.
- Holloway, J. (2002b). Class and Classification: Against, In and Beyond Labour. The Labour Debate. An Investigation into the Theory and Reality of Capitalist Work. A. Dinerstein and M. Neary. Aldershot, Ashgate.
- Holloway, J. and S. Picciotto, Eds. (1978). State and Capital. A Marxist Debate. London, Edward Arnold.
- Houlgate, S. (1998). "Absolute Knowing Revisited." The Owl of Minerva 30(1): 51-67.
- Houlgate, S. (2001). "Thought and Being in Kant and Hegel." The Owl of Minerva 22(2): 131-140.

- Houlgate, S. (2003). *G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit (1807): Thinking Philosophically without Begging the Question. The Classics of Western Philosophy: A Reader's Guide*. J. J. E. Gracia and G. M. Reichberg. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Hudis, P. (1998). "Dialectics, 'the Party' and the Problem of the New Society." Historical Materialism 3(Winter): 95-117.
- Hudis, P. (2004). "The Death of the Death of the Subject." Historical Materialism 12(3): 147-168.
- Hyppolite, J. (1991). Génesis y Estructura de la Fenomenología del Espíritu de Hegel. Barcelona, Ediciones Península.
- Iñigo Carrera, J. (1992). El Conocimiento Dialéctico. Buenos Aires, Centro para la Investigación como Crítica Práctica.
- Iñigo Carrera, J. (1995). De la simple mercancía a la mercancía-capital. La transformación de los valores en precios de producción. Buenos Aires, Centro para la Investigación como Crítica Práctica.
- Iñigo Carrera, J. (2003). El Capital: Razón Histórica, Sujeto Revolucionario y Conciencia. Buenos Aires, Ediciones Cooperativas.
- Jacoby, R. (1971). "Towards a Critique of Automatic Marxism: The Politics of Philosophy from Lukacs to the Frankfurt School." Telos 10(Winter): 119-146.
- Jacoby, R. (1975). "The Politics of Crisis Theory: Toward the Critique of Automatic Marxism II." Telos 23(Spring): 3-52.
- Kapferer, N. (1980). Commodity, Science and Technology: a Critique of Sohn-Rethel. Outlines of a Critique of Technology. P. Slater. London, Ink Links.



- Kautsky, K. (1978). La Revolucion Social/El Camino del Poder. Mexico, Pasado y Presente.
- Kay, G. (1979). Why Labour is the Starting Point of Capital. Value. The Representation of Labour in Capitalism. D. Elson. London, CSE Books.
- Kay, G. (1999). "Abstract Labour and Capital." Historical Materialism 5(Winter): 255-279.
- Kay, G. and J. Mott (1982). Political Order and the Law of Labour. London and Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Kicillof, A. and G. Starosta (2004). Value-producing labour and revolutionary action. A political discussion of the controversy over the specificity of capital.
- Kliman, A. (2000). "Marx's Concept of Intrinsic Value." Historical Materialism 6(Summer): 89-113.
- Krasivyyj, D. (1996). For the Recomposition of Social Labour. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from Endpage Web site:  
[http://www.endpage.com/Archives/Subversive Texts/Misc Libertarian Communist/recomposition.htm](http://www.endpage.com/Archives/Subversive_Texts/Misc_Libertarian_Communist/recomposition.htm).
- Lazzarato, M. (1996). Immaterial Labour. Radical Thought in Italy. A Potential Politics. P. Virno and M. Hardt. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Lazzarato, M. and A. Negri (1991). "Travail immatériel et subjectivité [Electronic Version]." Futur Antérieur 6. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from [http://multitudes.samizdat.net/article.php3?id\\_article=474](http://multitudes.samizdat.net/article.php3?id_article=474)
- Lebowitz, M. A. (2003). Beyond Capital. Marx's Political Economy of the Working Class (Second Edition). Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

- Lenin, V. I. (1971). **The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Government.** V.I. Lenin Collected Works Vol. 42. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Levin, P. (1997). **El Capital Tecnológico.** Buenos Aires, Catálogos.
- Lukács, G. (1971). **History and Class Consciousness.** London, Merlin Press.
- Maguire, J. (1972). **Marx's Paris Writing: An Analysis.** Dublin, Gill and Macmillan.
- Mandel, E. (1971). **The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx.** London, New Left Books.
- Marglin, S. A. (1974). "What do bosses do? The origins and functions of hierarchy in capitalist production." **Review of Radical Political Economics** 6(2 (Summer)): 60-112.
- Markus, G. (1980). "Four Forms of Critical Theory - Some Theses on Marx's Intellectual Development." **Thesis Eleven**(1): 78-93.
- Markus, G. (1982). "Alienation and Reification in Marx and Lukacs." **Thesis Eleven** 5/6: 139-161.
- Marramao, G. (1975/6). "Theory of Crisis and the Problem of Constitution." **Telos** 26(Winter): 143-164.
- Marramao, G. (1982). **Lo Político y las Transformaciones. Crítica del Capitalismo e Ideologías de la Crisis entre los Años 20 y 30.** Mexico, Pasado y Presente.
- Marx, K. (1965). Letter to Bolte in New York, November 23 1871. **Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Selected Correspondence.** Moscow, Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K. (1972). **Theories of Surplus-Value Volume 3.** London, Lawrence and Wishart.



- Marx, K. (1975a). Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 3. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1975b). Notes on Adolf Wagner. Karl Marx: Texts on Method. T. Carver. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Marx, K. (1976a). Capital. Volume 1. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1976b). Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 6. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1976c). The Poverty of Philosophy. Answer to the *Philosophy of Poverty* by M. Proudhon. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 6. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1976d). Results of the Immediate Process of Production. Capital. Volume 1. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1976e). Theses on Feuerbach. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 5. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1976f). Value. Studies by Marx. London, New Park Publications.
- Marx, K. (1976g). Wages. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 6. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1977). Wage Labour and Capital. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 9. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1978). Capital. Volume 2. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1983). Letter to Engels, 1 February 1858. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 40. London, Lawrence and Wishart.

- Marx, K. (1986). The Civil War in France. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 22. London, Lawrence & Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1987a). Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 29. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1987b). Letter to Sigfrid Meyer, 30 April 1867. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 42. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1988). Economic Manuscripts 1861-63. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 30. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1991). Capital. Volume 3. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1992a). A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction. Karl Marx. Early Writings. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1992b). Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts. Karl Marx. Early Writings. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1992c). Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy. Karl Marx. Early Writings. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1992d). Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Karl Marx. Early Writings. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1993). Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1994). Economic Works 1861-64. Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 34. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. and F. Engels (1975). The Holy Family. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 4. London, Lawrence and Wishart.



- Marx, K. and F. Engels (1976a). The German Ideology. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 5. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, K. and F. Engels (1976b). Manifesto of the Communist Party. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 6. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Mattick, P. (1958). "A Marxian Oddity. Review of 'Marxism and Freedom', by Raya Dunayevskaya." Western Socialist(March-April). Retrieved February 10, 2005 from Marxists.org Internet Archive Web site: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/mattick-paul/1958/dunayevskaya.htm>
- McLellan, D. (1973). Karl Marx. His Life and Thought. London and Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- McNally, D. (2004). "The Dual Form of Labour in Capitalist Society and the Struggle over Meaning. Comment on Postone." Historical Materialism 12(3): 189-208.
- Meek, R. (1973). Studies in the Labour Theory of Value. London, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Meikle, S. (1979). Dialectical Contradiction and Necessity. Issues in Marxist Philosophy. Volume I: Dialectics and Method. Brighton, The Harvester Press.
- Meikle, S. (1985). Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx. La Salle, IL, Open Court.
- Mészáros, I. (1970). Marx's Theory of Alienation. London, Merlin Press.
- Mészáros, I. (1995). Beyond Capital. London, Merlin Press.

- Mohun, S. (1994). Introduction. Debates in Value Theory. S. Mohun.  
Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Mohun, S. and S. Himmelweit (1978). "The Anomalies of Capital." Capital and Class 6(Autumn): 67-105.
- Moseley, F., Ed. (1993). Marx's Method in Capital: a Reexamination. Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Humanities Press.
- Moseley, F. and M. Campbell, Eds. (1997). New Investigations of Marx's Method. Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Humanities Press.
- Müller, W. and C. Neusüss (1975). "The Illusion of State Socialism and the Contradiction between Wage Labor and Capital." Telos 25(Fall): 13-90.
- Murray, P. (1988). Marx's Theory of Scientific Knowledge. Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Humanities Press.
- Murray, P. (2000). "Marx's 'Truly Social' Labour Theory of Value: Part I, Abstract Labour in Marxian Value Theory." Historical Materialism 6(Summer): 27-65.
- Murray, P. (2002). "Reply to Geert Reuten." Historical Materialism 10(1): 155-176.
- Murray, P. (2003). Things Fall Apart: Historical and Systematic Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy. New Dialectics and Political Economy. R. Albritton and J. Simoulidis. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Murray, P. (2004). The Social and Material Transformation of Production by Capital: Formal and Real Subsumption in Capital, Volume 1. The Constitution of Capital. Essays on Volume I of Marx's Capital. R. Bellofiore and N. Taylor. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.



- Neary, M. (2004). "Travel's in Moishe Postone's *Time, Labor and Social Domination*: A Contribution to a Critique of Political Cosmology." Historical Materialism 12(3): 239-260.
- Négation, C. (1973). "LIP and the Self-Managed Counter-Revolution [Electronic Version]." Négation 3. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from For Communism Web site: <http://www.geocities.com/~johngray/lip.htm>
- Negri, A. (1991). Marx Beyond Marx. Lessons on the Grundrisse. New York, Autonomedia.
- Negri, A. (1992). Fin de Siglo. Barcelona, Paidos Iberica/I.C.E-U.A.B.
- Negri, A. and F. Guattari (1999). Las Verdades Nomadas & General Intellect, Poder Constituyente, Comunismo. Barcelona, Akal.
- Ollman, B. (1971). Alienation. Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society. London, Cambridge University Press.
- O'Malley, J. (1970). Editor's Introduction. Karl Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. J. O'Malley. London, Cambridge University Press.
- Pannekoek, A. (1948). Lenin as Philosopher [Electronic Version], Retrieved February 10, 2005 from For Communism Web site: <http://www.geocities.com/~johngray/lenphl.htm>.
- Panzieri, R. (1980). The Capitalist use of Machinery: Marx versus the Objectivists. Outlines of a critique of technology. P. Slater. London, Ink Links.
- Pashukanis, E. (1983). Law and Marxism. London, Pluto Press.
- Perkins, S. (1993). Marxism and the Proletariat. A Lukacsian Perspective. London, Pluto Press.

Piccone, P. (1975). "Reading the Grundrisse: Beyond "Orthodox" Marxism."

Theory and Society 2(2): 235-255.

Postone, M. (1978). "Necessity, Labor and Time." Social Research(45): 739-788.

Postone, M. (1996). Time, Labor and Social Domination. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Radical Chains Collective (1993). "The Leopard in the 20th Century." Radical Chains(4): 18-27.

Reichelt, H. (1995). Why did Marx Conceal his Dialectical Method? Open Marxism. Volume 3: Emancipating Marx. W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn, J. Holloway and K. Psychopedis. London, Pluto Press.

Reichelt, H. (forthcoming). "Marx's Critique of Economic Categories. Reflections on the Problem of Validity in the Dialectical Method of Presentation in Capital." Historical Materialism.

Reinfelder, M. (1980). Introduction: Breaking the Spell of Technicism. Outlines of a Critique of Technology. P. Slater. London, Ink Links.

Reinfelder, M. and P. Slater (1978). "Intellectual and Manual Labour: an Introduction to Alfred Sohn-Rethel." Capital and Class 6(Autumn): 126-146.

Reuten, G. (1988). Value as Social Form. Value, Social Form and the State. M. Williams. New York, St. Martin's.

Reuten, G. (1993). The Difficult Labor of a Theory of Social Value, Metaphors and Systematic Dialectics at the Beginning of Marx's "Capital". Marx's Method in Capital: a Reexamination. F. Moseley. Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Humanities Press.



- Reuten, G. (2000). "The Interconnection between Systematic Dialectics and Historical Materialism." Historical Materialism 7(Winter): 137-166.
- Reuten, G. and M. Williams (1989). Value-Form and the State. The Tendencies of Accumulation and the Determination of Economic Policy in Capitalist Society. London, Routledge.
- Robles Báez, M. L. (1992). Reflections on Marx's Concept of Capital. International Conference on Marxism and New World Order: Crisis and Possibilities, University of Massachusetts-Amherst.
- Robles Báez, M. L. (1997). "On Marx's Dialectic of the Genesis of the Money-Form." International Journal of Political Economy 27(3): 35-64.
- Robles Báez, M. L. (2000). La Influencia Del Método 'Lógico-Histórico' De Engels En Las Interpretaciones Sobre El Objeto De La Sección Primera Del Tomo I De El Capital De Marx: Crítica Y Propuesta. International Working Group in Value Theory mini-conference at the Eastern Economic Association, Crystal City, Washington.
- Robles Báez, M. L. (2004). On the Abstraction of Labour as a Social Determination. The New Value Controversy and the Foundations of Economics. A. Freeman, A. Kliman and J. Wells. Aldershot, Edward Elgar.
- Roemer, J., Ed. (1986). Analytical Marxism. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Rosdolsky, R. (1986). Genesis y Estructura de El Capital de Marx (estudios sobre los Grundrisse). Mexico, Siglo XXI.
- Rose, G. (1995). Hegel contra Sociology. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ, Athlone.

- Rovatti, P. A. (1973). "The Critique of Fetishism in Marx's Grundrisse." Telos 17(Fall): 56-69.
- Rubin, I. I. (1972). Essays on Marx's Theory of Value. Detroit, Black and Red.
- Rubin, I. I. (1978). "Abstract Labour and Value in Marx's System." Capital and Class(1978, Summer): 107-139.
- Saad-Filho, A. (1997). "Concrete and Abstract Labour in Marx's Theory of Value." Review of Political Economy 9(4): 457-477.
- Saad-Filho, A. (2002). The Value of Marx. Political Economy for Contemporary Capitalism. London, Routledge.
- Sayer, D. (1979). Marx's Method. Ideology, Science and Critique in Capital. Sussex, The Harvester Press.
- Sayer, D. (1987). The Violence of Abstraction. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Schmidt, A. (1971). The Concept of Nature in Marx. London, New Left Books.
- Schmidt, A. (1983). History and Structure. An Essay on Hegelian-Marxist and Structuralist Theories of History. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.
- Schumpeter, J. (1934). The Theory of Economic Development. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- Schumpeter, J. (1947). Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy. London, George Allen & Unwin.
- Scoville, J. G. (2001). "The Taylorization of Vladimir Illich Lenin." Industrial Relations 40(4 (October)): 620-626.
- Sekine, T. (1997). An outline of the dialectic of capital. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Shandro, A. (1995). "'Consciousness from Without': Marxism, Lenin and the Proletariat." Science and Society 59(3): 268-297.
- Shortall, F. (1994). The Incomplete Marx. Aldershot, Avebury.



Smith, C. (n/d). Hegel, Marx and the Enlightenment:

an Interim Report, Retrieved February 10, 2005 from Marxists.org Internet

Archive Web site: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/smith-cyril/works/articles/interim.htm>.

Smith, T. (1990a). The Logic of Marx's Capital. Replies to Hegelian Criticisms. Albany, SUNY Press.

Smith, T. (1990b). "Review of 'Dialectics of Labor: Marx and his Relation to Hegel'." The Owl of Minerva 22(1): 108-12.

Smith, T. (1993). Dialectical Social Theory and its Critics. Albany, SUNY Press.

Smith, T. (2000). Technology and Capital in the Age of Lean Production. A Marxian Critique of the "New Economy". Albany, SUNY Press.

Smith, T. (2001). "Review of *Hegel and History* by Joe McCarney." Historical Materialism 9: 217-25.

Smith, T. (2003). "On the Homology Thesis." Historical Materialism 11(1): 185-194.

Smith, T. (2004). Technology and History in Capitalism: Marxian and Neo-Shumpeterian Perspectives. The Constitution of Capital. R. Bellofiore and N. Taylor. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Sohn-Rethel, A. (1978). Intellectual and Manual Labour. A Critique of Epistemology. Basingstoke, Macmillan.

Starosta, G. (2003). "Scientific Knowledge and Political Action: On the Antinomies of Lukács' Thought in *History and Class Consciousness*." Science and Society 67(1, Spring): 39-67.

Starosta, G. (2004). "Rethinking Marx's Mature Social Theory." Historical Materialism 12(3): 43-52.

- Stoeltzer, M. (2004). "Postone's Marx: A Theorist of Modern Society, its Social Movements and its Imprisonment by Abstract Labour." Historical Materialism 12(3): 261-283.
- Sweezy, P. (1968). The Theory of Capitalist Development. New York, Monthly Review Press.
- Teeple, G. (1984). Marx's Critique of Politics 1842-1847. Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
- Théorie Communiste (2003). "Aufheben's 'Decadence': A response." Aufheben 11.
- Thompson, E. P. (1971). Customs in Common. London, Merlin.
- Trotsky, L. (2002). The Transitional Program [Electronic Version], Retrieved February 10, 2005 from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1938-tp/transprogram.pdf>.
- Tucker, R. C. (1961). Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx. London, Cambridge University Press.
- Uchida, H. (1988). Marx's Grundrisse and Hegel's Logic. London and New York, Routledge.
- Virno, P. (1996). Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus. Radical Thought in Italy. A Potential Politics. M. Hardt and P. Virno. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Walton, P. (1972). From Alienation to Surplus-Value: Developments in the Dialectic of Labour. Situating Marx: Evaluation and Departures. P. Walton and S. Hall. London, Chaucer Publishing Company.



**Weeks, J. (1981). Capital and Exploitation. New Jersey, Princeton University Press.**

**Williams, H. (1989). Hegel, Heraclitus and Marx's Dialectic. Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf.**

**Williams, M., Ed. (1988). Value, Social Form and the State. New York, St. Martin's.**

**Wright, S. (1995/1996). "Confronting the crisis of 'fordism': Italian debates around social transition [Electronic Version]." Chaos 10. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from <http://www.arpnet.it/chaos/steve.htm>**